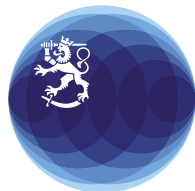


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Marzia Fontana and  
Sophie Mitra



# Inclusive trade and persons with disabilities

Ministry for Foreign  
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Marzia Fontana and Sophie Mitra

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## Inclusive trade and persons with disabilities

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**Abstract**

Current debates on inclusive trade pay limited attention to how trade policies can be designed and implemented to reduce barriers affecting persons with disabilities. This report contributes to a disability inclusive trade policy agenda by building an analytical framework that illustrates the multiple channels through which greater trade integration impacts persons with disabilities, and by developing a definition of disability inclusive trade that can be operationalized. The report combines this analytical framework with insights from selected projects in low and middle-income countries to offer recommendations for how Aid for Trade interventions can ensure that trade supports the realization of the economic rights of persons with disabilities. To this end, the report highlights the relevance of policies for not only improving working conditions in trade-related occupations where persons with disabilities already work, but also creating better employment opportunities in higher value-added segments of global value chains. The report notes that trade policies must also aim to improve the affordability and quality of food, medicines and assistive technology products, and be formulated to promote equitable access to care services, roads, transport and ICT infrastructure for persons with disabilities. Effective policy coordination is important since all these dimensions are interrelated.

Report prepared for the Sustainable Trade Unit (KPO-30) of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

**Keywords** status of disabled people, international trade, development cooperation, disability research

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### Tiivistelmä

Ajankohtaisissa osallistavaa kauppaa koskeissa keskusteluissa kiinnitetään liian vähän huomiota siihen, miten kauppapolitiikan suunnittelulla ja toteutuksella voitaisiin vähentää vammaisiin henkilöihin vaikuttavia esteitä. Tämä selvitys edistää vammaisten henkilöiden ottamista huomioon kauppapolitiikassa. Selvityksessä kuvataan analyyttisen viitekehyksen avulla kanavia, joiden kautta kaupan lisääntynyt integraatio vaikuttaa vammaisiin henkilöihin, ja määrittellään vammaisia henkilöitä osallistavan kaupan käsite niin, että se on mahdollista operationalisoida. Selvityksen analyyttisen kehyksen sekä valituista matalan ja keskitulotason maiden hankkeista kerätyn tiedon perusteella annetaan suosituksia siitä, miten kauppaa tukevan kehitysyhteistyön (Aid of Trade) interventioilla voitaisiin varmistaa, että kauppa tukee vammaisten henkilöiden taloudellisten oikeuksien toteutumista. Tämän saavuttamiseksi selvityksessä korostetaan politiikan merkitystä siinä, että vammaisten henkilöiden työoloja voidaan kansainväliseen kauppaan liittyvissä ammateissa parantaa ja heidän työllisyysmahdollisuuksiaan lisätä globaalien arvoketjujen korkeampaa lisäarvoa tuottavissa osissa. Selvityksessä todetaan, että kauppapolitiikalla on pyrittävä parantamaan elintarvikkeiden, lääkkeiden ja apuvälineteknologian kohtuuhintaisuutta ja laatua. Sen tulee myös edistää vammaisten henkilöiden yhdenvertaisia mahdollisuuksia käyttää hoivapalveluita, teitä, liikennevälineitä sekä tieto- ja viestintätekniikan infrastruktuureja. Koska kaikki nämä näkökohdat liittyvät toisiinsa, politiikan koordinointi on tärkeää.

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## Inkluderande handel och personer med funktionsnedsättning

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### Referat

I aktuella debatter om inkluderande handel ägnas begränsad uppmärksamhet åt frågan om hur handelspolitiken kan utformas och implementeras för att minska hinder som berör personer med funktionsnedsättning. Denna rapport bidrar till utformandet av en handelspolitisk agenda för inkludering av personer med funktionsnedsättning genom att skapa ett analytiskt ramverk som illustrerar de många kanaler genom vilka ökad handelsintegration påverkar personer med funktionsnedsättning samt genom att ta fram en definition av inkluderande handel för personer med funktionsnedsättning som kan omsättas i praktiken.

Denna rapport kombinerar det ovannämnda analytiska ramverket med insikter från utvalda projekt i låg- och medelinkomstländer i syfte att ge rekommendationer om hur insatser inom handelsrelaterat bistånd (Aid for Trade) kan säkerställa att handeln stöder förverkligandet av de ekonomiska rättigheterna för personer med funktionsnedsättning. I detta syfte betonar rapporten betydelsen av politiska åtgärder inte bara för att förbättra arbetsvillkoren i handelsrelaterade yrken där personer med funktionsnedsättning redan arbetar, utan också för att skapa bättre sysselsättningsmöjligheter i segment med högre mervärde i globala värdekedjor.

Rapporten betonar att handelspolitiken också måste sträva efter att förbättra tillgången till och kvaliteten på livsmedel, mediciner och produkter inom hjälpmedelsteknik samt utformas för att främja jämlik tillgång till omsorgstjänster, vägar, transporter och IKT-infrastruktur för personer med funktionsnedsättning. Det är viktigt att politiken samordnas eftersom alla dessa dimensioner hänger samman.

**Nyckelord** ställningen för personer med funktionsnedsättning, internationell handel, utvecklingssamarbete, funktionshinderforskning

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## FOREWORD

This report was triggered by the observation that there is very little information or research available on persons with disabilities in the context of inclusive trade. To date inclusive trade initiatives have focused mainly on strengthening the participation of women and young people in trade opportunities. However, disability inclusion receives only limited attention in these initiatives.

This is surprising as persons with disabilities account for some 15 % of the world's population, or around one billion people. Clearly the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), that underscore the importance of leaving no one behind, cannot be met if the rights of persons with disabilities are not adequately addressed also in trade related initiatives.

To address this lacuna the Sustainable Trade Unit of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs commissioned this report to increase knowledge and awareness of the multiple ways in which international trade affects the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. The report also identifies policies and programmes to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in economic activities on an equal basis with others.

The report was prepared by Dr. Marzia Fontana and Prof. Sophie Mitra. They have undertaken a huge task in meticulously outlining the key issues involved in disability inclusive trade and in developing an analytical framework for deepening our understanding on how trade integration impacts persons with disabilities. Their excellent work is gratefully acknowledged.

To our knowledge this report is the first of its kind in terms of how thoroughly disability inclusive trade is covered. We are confident that this work will spark further research and initiatives to improve inclusion of persons with disabilities.

Kent Wilska, Director, Sustainable Trade Unit  
Antti Piispanen, Commercial counsellor, Sustainable Trade Unit

## List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning
ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
AfT	Aid for Trade
AFTGRs	Aid for Trade Global Reviews
AT	Assistive Technology
BW	Better Work
CCBA	Coca Cola Beverages Africa
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EABL	East African Breweries Limited
ECDD	Ethiopian Center for Disability and Development
ETI	Ethical Trading Initiative
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GATE	Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GPA	Government Procurement Agreement
GVCs	Global Value Chains
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
IW	Inclusion Works
KEFEADO	Kenya Female Advisory Organization
LMICs	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPDs	Organizations of Persons with Disabilities

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
OSH	Occupational Safety and Health
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UN	United Nations
WDR	World Development Report
WTO	World Trade Organization

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## Executive Summary

International trade works best if everyone is able to benefit. Disadvantaged groups, however, have limited access to the opportunities generated by trade and they disproportionately shoulder adjustment costs associated with it. The goal of inclusive trade policies is therefore to ensure that the benefits and opportunities from trade are widely shared and, as a result, better outcomes are created for more people, especially those who tend to be left behind by economic reforms. One such group is persons with disabilities.

### **Persons with disabilities face many barriers and do not fully benefit from trade.**

Persons with disabilities account for one in six adults worldwide and include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with environmental barriers, often hinder their ability to participate in society on an equal basis with others. Disability is universally relevant because anyone can become disabled over the course of a lifetime. Evidence from both high-income and low-income countries shows that persons with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty, have more limited access to education and health care, are burdened with higher costs of living, and face barriers to well-paid and stable jobs (Chapter 2). These inequalities mean that concerted policy effort is required if persons with disabilities are to benefit more fully from trade opportunities.

**Existing debates on inclusive trade do not pay sufficient attention to disability inclusion.** International trade has distributional consequences because it changes the goods and services that are produced and consumed within countries. It also affects employment opportunities and working conditions. The distributional effects of trade liberalization have long been studied in the academic literature, particularly with reference to the impact on workers in low-income and high-income countries. It is only in the last few years, however, that a concern for inclusive trade has become prominent in international organizations and national government policies.

For example, recent reviews of the Aid for Trade initiative (*Aid for Trade Global Reviews*) by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) demonstrate increasing attention to themes of inclusion, sustainable trade and the economic empowerment of women and youth, among donors and recipient countries alike (Chapter 1). With a few exceptions, however, existing policy

statements and flagship reports on inclusive trade pay only lip service to the barriers affecting persons with disabilities, and do not offer concrete suggestions on how trade policies can be designed and implemented to reduce such barriers.

**Main aims and contribution of this report.** This report is aimed at both the trade community and the disability community and hopes to encourage dialogue between practitioners from different fields. The report contributes to the promotion of a disability inclusive trade policy agenda by building an analytical framework that illustrates the multiple ways in which greater trade integration can affect persons with disabilities, and by developing a definition of disability inclusive trade that can be operationalized. The report combines this analytical framework with insights from selected case studies from low and middle-income countries (LMICs) to offer recommendations on the measures needed to ensure that trade is conducive to the realization of the economic and social rights of persons with disabilities.

The report takes the view that reducing barriers and asymmetries to promote better terms of inclusion of persons with disabilities in international trade requires a comprehensive policy agenda, across various economic dimensions and policy levels. Aid for Trade has an important role to play in facilitating the implementation of such policies and to ensure that domestic trade policy agendas in LMICs are closely aligned with objectives of disability inclusion.

**International trade affects persons with disabilities through three main interrelated channels, which are affected in turn by digitalization.** The analytical framework developed in this report describes three main channels through which trade-related changes in prices, production structures and regulations can variously affect different households and individuals in an economy: the employment channel, the consumption channel and the public provision channel (Chapter 3).

**Policy needs to both improve employment conditions in trade-related sectors where persons with disabilities already work, and to increase their access to jobs in higher value-added sectors.** With regard to the employment channel, international trade can be a source of both 'good' jobs and 'bad' jobs (Section 3.2). Good jobs are jobs that have decent job characteristics according to the ILO definition, while bad jobs are jobs characterized by low earnings and poor working conditions, such as those faced by many micro-entrepreneurs and agricultural labourers at the bottom of global value chains. Governments, private companies and civil society organizations all have an important role to play in promoting measures that enable persons with disabilities to access good jobs, and to reduce the risk of them remaining confined to informal jobs, where they are usually overrepresented. The report argues that these measures need to include not only policies to enhance terms and conditions of work in occupations and sectors where persons

with disabilities already work (e.g. extending social protection coverage to informal workers in both agriculture and textiles), but also policies to increase access of persons with disabilities to jobs in higher value-added segments of GVCs, thus widening their options. The report also notes that a twin-track strategy involving both the promotion of programmes that specifically target workers with disabilities, and the inclusion of disability concerns in mainstream policy programmes, is needed.

**Programmes addressing specific barriers faced by micro-entrepreneurs and small-holders with disabilities remain limited in scale and scope.** In recent years, a number of programmes have started to address the specific barriers faced by micro-entrepreneurs and small-holders with disabilities in GVCs in selected countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Section 4.1). Some of the existing projects recognize the value of holistic approaches and seek to address multiple barriers, by encouraging collaboration between organizations of persons with disabilities, the private sector and the government. These projects strive to offer support that often combines improved access to training together with provision of inputs, appropriate tools and assistive technologies, as well as links to higher value markets.

These programmes tend to remain at a small scale, however, and often continue to face challenges related to macro-level barriers, such as poor electricity and water infrastructure or weakly enforced national legislation. Moreover, they tend to mainly include workers with physical impairments, and are less successful in reaching out to persons with other disability types. With regard to sectoral focus, ongoing initiatives are mainly concentrated in export-oriented agriculture and textiles. It would be important that interventions aimed at generating decent jobs for persons with disabilities extend to other trade-related sectors which are becoming prominent in the AfT policy agenda, such as sustainable tourism and ICT.

At the broader global level of GVC governance for disability inclusion, initiatives include the Code Guidance on Disability by the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and various projects under the Fairtrade movement. More policy efforts and coordination are needed, however, both at global and local levels.

**Food, medicines and assistive technology are trade-related goods of special significance to persons with disabilities.** With regard to the consumption channel, persons with and without disabilities may have distinct needs and consumption patterns, and often different decision-making power regarding how to spend their family income. Hence, they may be affected differently by changes in the relative prices of goods and services generated by greater trade integration (Section 3.3). Different types of impairments in interaction with gender, age, ethnicity, and place of residence further



affect how persons with disabilities experience trade-induced changes in the cost of living and the availability of goods. The report focuses on food, medicines, and assistive technology (AT) as goods that are especially important for the disabled community.

AT, in particular, covers a wide range of products, from hearing aids to prostheses to eyeglasses, which are variously affected by trade regulations. AT products can enable people to live independent and dignified lives. They can also enhance access to employment and labour productivity, thus, in principle, allowing workers with disabilities to access more remunerative jobs generated by trade. Yet, most people who need AT products are currently unable to access them, particularly in LMICs.

Each AT market has its own characteristics, with different modes of organizing production along GVCs, degrees of competition, tax structures, intellectual property rules, and quality standards. Currently, the bulk of international trade in AT takes place among high-income countries, while many LMICs rely on a mixture of imports, sub-standard local production and donations, which often do not manage to adequately meet their populations' needs. The report mentions a few initiatives in this policy area, most notably ATscale, and makes suggestions for addressing bottlenecks between AT supply and AT demand (Section 4.2). Measures could include, for example: AfT infrastructure investment to specifically address supply chain inefficiencies in AT markets; tariff reviews aimed at removing tariffs on AT products when relevant; and, most importantly, AfT support towards building LMICs' skills in producing AT that meets local needs, and promoting South-South cooperation in the production of AT spare parts and in assistance with service repairs.

**Trade can affect the capacity of national governments to reduce barriers that persons with disabilities face in infrastructure and social services.** With regard to the public provision channel, trade policies can affect the level of government revenue as well as the conditions under which public services can be subcontracted to private firms, including foreign ones. This can impact the capacity of the government to provide infrastructure and services vital for the well-being of its population in general, and for persons with disabilities in particular, such as health and social care as well as transportation, water and sanitation (Section 3.4). It is therefore important that international trade commitments are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Public investments in accessible roads, transport and digital networks as well as public provision of quality healthcare and childcare are important to enable persons with disabilities to enjoy good health, education, and political participation. By reducing key barriers in the broad environment, improved physical and social infrastructure could also enable persons with disabilities to take new jobs where they can be more productive and fulfilled. This kind of investments would have broader benefits, including for fairness and social justice in general, and for a country's overall trade competitiveness.

**Digitalization is transforming international trade.** The framework developed in this report describes digitalization as an underlying process that interacts with the employment, consumption and public provision channels to create both opportunities and challenges for persons with disabilities. Digital technologies have the potential to support the expansion of international trade and make it more inclusive, including for workers, public services users and consumers with disabilities (Section 3.5). However, existing shortcomings in ICT infrastructure, affordability of connection, limited digital skills and a lack of clear regulatory frameworks, mean that the digital divide remains wide, between countries as well as between urban and rural areas, between large firms and small firms, between men and women, and between persons with and without disabilities (Section 4.3). There are many ways in which AfT could be used to make digital trade more accessible to persons with disabilities.

**In sum, what would a disability inclusive trade policy agenda look like?** In order to be inclusive of persons with disabilities and their communities, trade policies need to incorporate several features in design and implementation (Chapter 3; Chapter 4). Trade agreements need to adopt a human rights approach to disability, and rules governing trade decision-making processes must enable persons with disabilities to play a key role in shaping trade policy agendas. Trade policies, in coordination with other policies, should improve working conditions and pay in trade-related occupations where persons with disabilities are already employed, but also create better employment opportunities in higher value-added sectors. Trade policies must also aim to improve the availability, and reduce the prices of quality food, medicines and AT products. It is also important that trade regulations likely to affect the provision of public services are formulated to protect equitable access for the disadvantaged, and that sufficient resources are allocated to ensure universal accessibility standards for roads, transport and ICT infrastructure.

**Policy recommendations.** The report concludes with a number of recommendations for how Aid for Trade can best be used to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities (Chapter 5):

1. Ensure that global trade rules are consistent with government commitments to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities.
2. Support the active involvement of persons with disabilities and OPDs in Aft design and implementation, and in trade policy arenas in general.
3. Support holistic approaches to employment policy and robust multi-stakeholder engagement to promote decent jobs in GVCs for persons with disabilities, with emphasis on high value-added sectors and occupations.
4. Invest in physical infrastructure that complies with universal design principles and promote comprehensive accessibility.
5. Reduce the digital divide to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in ICT-enabled international trade.
6. Develop local capacity to provide AT products and repair services, and help firms from low-income countries to integrate into global AT markets.
7. Strengthen data analysis and monitoring.
8. Expand analysis in policy documents on inclusive trade to increase visibility of specific issues and barriers affecting persons with disabilities.

# 1 Does inclusive trade include persons with disabilities?

## 1.1 Main goals of the report and the scope of trade policy

One of the pillars of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the pledge to “leave no one behind” in the process of economic and social development. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 is about decent work and inclusive and sustainable economic growth, and one of its outcome targets (SDG target 8.5) commits to achieve by 2030 “full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities”. One of the SDG8 ‘means of implementation’ targets (SDG target 8.a) is to “Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, in particular least developed countries”. These pledges have become ever more salient in the context of policy efforts to promote more just and equitable economies in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Aid for Trade (AFT) initiative was launched by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2005 with the objective of helping low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to strengthen their trade capacity and benefit from trade agreements. In recent years, the AFT policy agenda has given increasing attention to inclusion, sustainable trade and the economic empowerment of women and youth (OECD and WTO 2019, 2022). Greater effort is required, however, to reach groups that remain marginalized by international trade. One such group are persons with disabilities, who account for one in six adults worldwide (WHO 2022).

Recognizing that more action is needed to ensure that persons with disabilities participate on decent terms in global value chains (GVCs), and that trade policy more broadly contributes to the full realization of their rights, the Sustainable Trade Unit at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland has commissioned this report. Its two main aims are to:

1. increase knowledge and awareness among the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and other Aid for Trade stakeholders of the multiple ways in which international trade can affect the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities
2. offer suggestions to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and the wider Aid for Trade community, on policies and programmes to remove barriers preventing persons with disabilities from benefitting from trade opportunities, and to promote their inclusion in economic activities on an equal basis with others.

This report uses a broad notion of trade policy, to include not only tariffs and export promotion, but also services liberalization, measures regarding investment, government procurement and various other trade-related regulations and standards. It considers measures that national governments might take unilaterally as well as measures and regulations that are covered under regional or multilateral trade agreements.

Trade and investment agreements are part of an intricate web of policies involving not only export promotion but also fiscal policies, infrastructural investment and sectoral policies as well as labour market policies and institutional reforms. These policies impact on poverty, inequality and human development by re-arranging relations of power and access to resources between different groups. **In the absence of substantial public investment and complementary policies, trade expansion on its own is unlikely to benefit the most disadvantaged groups in a country,** and might instead lead to inequitable outcomes. For this reason, the report takes the view that trade policies should not be conceived and implemented in isolation, but require close coordination with other measures across various dimensions and policy levels. Aid for Trade has an important role to play in facilitating the coordination and implementation of all these policies and to ensure that trade policy agendas are closely aligned with objectives of inclusion.

The report is aimed at both the trade community and the disability community and hopes to facilitate dialogue between practitioners from different fields. It is divided in five main chapters.

The present Chapter 1 offers an introduction to the concepts of disability and inclusive trade, respectively. Disability is defined in section 1.2. Section 1.3 discusses how inclusive trade has been defined in selected flagship reports by international organizations and asks

whether current conceptualizations address issues relevant to disability inclusion. Section 1.4 reviews the ways in which trade agreements have included reference to persons with disabilities and identifies modalities of inclusion that best promote their rights. Section 1.5 concludes by sketching a working definition of ‘disability inclusive trade’.

The rest of the report is organized as follows. Chapter 2 describes the main inequalities and barriers faced by persons with disabilities as well as legal and policy instruments to reduce them. Chapter 3 outlines an analytical framework for understanding the effects of trade on persons with disabilities. Chapter 4 describes promising initiatives and programmes on the ground in selected policy areas. Chapter 5 makes policy recommendations.

## 1.2 Disability is a universal human rights issue

‘Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others’ (UNCRPD 2006: 4). Persons with disabilities are a large and diverse group and a key part of the global community (WHO-World Bank, 2011). Global estimates suggest that one in 10 children and one in six adults have some type of disability (UNICEF 2021, WHO 2022, Mitra and Yap 2021). Disabilities can be visible or invisible, range from mild to severe, and might affect anyone, for instance from an infant born with cerebral palsy, to a prime age adult with chronic lower back pain or an older adult who becomes unable to walk or see. Functional difficulties can be in various domains such as walking, seeing, hearing, self-care, cognition, communication, anxiety, depression and pain.

Disability is universally relevant because anyone can experience functional difficulties over the course of a lifetime. However, disabilities tend to be more common among women and older people and most persons with disabilities live in low- and middle-income countries.

Disability can be understood and defined in various ways depending on the objective of the definition, be it for data collection, the eligibility to programs (e.g. parking benefit, disability insurance) and the scope of anti-discrimination legislations and policies (e.g. quotas). If disability is understood as a personal tragedy or as a medical notion, then it seems related to charity or health care policy, and its relevance to international trade might be unclear or limited, at best. Yet, trade can affect the barriers that persons with disabilities face in the economy. In turn, the fact that persons with disabilities are often unable to participate in economic life on an equal basis with others may undermine a country’s trade performance.

Modern definitions of disability frame disability as a biopsychosocial and interactional phenomenon, one that results from an individual with a health condition or impairment interacting with environmental and resource factors (Goodley, 2016; Mitra, 2018). Environmental barriers can be in the general physical environment (e.g. lack of curb cuts in sidewalks, absence of elevators in train stations and of accessible trains or buses) and in specific institutional settings such as schools and the workplace (e.g. ableism, discrimination by employers). Attitudinal barriers resulting in stigmatisation and discrimination are a major obstacle to the full participation of persons with disabilities. A lack of resources such as the unavailability of affordable and quality glasses, hearing aids, wheelchairs, crutches, software and apps that support communication, can also impede the activities and participation of persons with health conditions and impairments and lead to deprivations.

Increasingly, disability is understood through a human rights approach. As noted by Quinn et al. (2002), “the human rights perspective on disability means viewing people with disabilities as subjects and not as objects. It entails moving away from viewing people with disabilities as problems towards viewing them as holders of rights. Importantly, it means locating problems outside the disabled person and addressing the manner in which various economic and social processes accommodate the difference of disability – or not, as the case may be.”

The scope of the human rights perspective is broad and goes beyond anti-discrimination law. In addition to civil and political rights, it also covers economic, social and cultural rights. It recognizes that people need more than political participation and not being discriminated against. They also need housing, schooling, jobs and cultural participation. Trade policies that are designed and implemented in equitable and inclusive ways can contribute to the realization of these rights.

### 1.3 Perspectives on inclusive trade from selected international organizations

International trade has distributional consequences because it changes the goods and services that are produced and consumed within countries. It also affects employment opportunities and conditions of employment. These effects can be either positive or negative and vary by social group. Broadly, the goal of inclusive trade policy is to ensure that the benefits of trade are widely shared and that, as a result, better outcomes are created for more people, including marginalized and under-represented groups (Goff,

2021). The concepts of inclusive trade and inclusive growth have become prominent in policy debates as a response to concerns about increasing inequalities both within and between countries, particularly after the 2007–2008 global financial crisis.<sup>1</sup>

While there is agreement that inclusive trade is concerned with extending the benefits of trade to a larger share of the population, views on which dimensions of inclusivity should be considered, how the concept of inclusive trade should be operationalized, and how progress towards inclusive trade can be monitored, differ among researchers and policy-makers alike (e.g. Rauniyar and Kanbur, 2010; Saha, A. et al., 2021). This section examines the perspectives of a few international organizations that are influential in the trade policy arena, as reflected in key flagship reports. The aim is to identify emerging priorities in current trade policy agendas, and to **examine whether existing conceptualizations of inclusive trade address issues relevant to disability inclusion, either explicitly or implicitly.**

### UNCTAD's 2017 Trade and Development Report

UNCTAD's 2017 Trade and Development Report "Beyond austerity, towards a global new deal" (the UNCTAD report thereafter) provides a comprehensive analysis of "hyperglobalization". The term "hyperglobalization" has been first used by Rodrik (2011) to describe a type of globalization in which multinational companies are able to avoid the rules and regulations of national governments and is considered therefore as "globalization which has gone too far."<sup>2</sup> In line with this assessment, UNCTAD (2017) calls for structural reforms that go well beyond country level measures to address supply-side constraints. It argues that broader and bolder policies to address power imbalances, reduce inequalities and promote inclusive outcomes are required, at both global and national levels.

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1 For instance, the Declaration on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015 by the Member States of the United Nations commits to "... create conditions for sustainable, inclusive and sustained economic growth, shared prosperity and decent work for all, taking into account different levels of national development and capacities."

2 More specifically, Dani Rodrik defines hyper-globalization as a type of globalization aimed at the elimination of all transaction costs associated with the movement between the natural borders of nation states of goods, services, capital, and finance. These costs are not limited to tariffs and quotas, but also include domestic regulations, standards, rules on product safety, rules on intellectual property, and banking regulations. Rodrik does not suggest to reduce globalization per se, but to change its rules and power dynamics. Even though many commentators note that the process of globalization has reversed in recent years, the main tenets of Rodrik's argument remain.



The UNCTAD report states (UNCTAD, 2017: p.31): “Moving away from hyperglobalization to inclusive economies is not a matter of simply making markets work better, whether by enhancing human capital, filling information gaps, smartening incentives, extending credit to poor people, or providing stronger protection to consumers. Rather, it requires a more exacting and encompassing agenda that addresses the global and national asymmetries in resource mobilization, technological know-how, market power and political influence caused by hyperglobalization, which generate and perpetuate exclusionary outcomes”.

An important contribution of the UNCTAD report is its notion of “simultaneity of inclusion and exclusion”. By introducing this idea, the report intends to highlight that those who have been most excluded from economic well-being have indeed been integrated into trade. However, they have been included on unfavourable terms in labour markets offering insecure jobs and low wages, and borne the bulk of the costs of reduced public services, limited social protection, and crises of the financial system.

The report identifies the main problem in the high concentration of wealth and market power and the resulting economic polarization within and between countries as well as between groups with different control over resources (such as creditors and debtors, wage earners and profit earners, financial and industrial interests and so on). It examines three sources of exclusion: the segmentation of labour markets, with emphasis on gender inequalities; corporate strategies to concentrate market power; and the automation of production, especially robotization.

In highlighting power asymmetries and growing inequalities in the spheres of both production and finance, the UNCTAD report stands out for its attention to the dynamics of both exclusion and inclusion in the context of global trade. It reminds us that inclusion of disadvantaged people in economic activities can be harmful as well as beneficial. **It is therefore essential to pay attention not to inclusion per se, but to the conditions under which people are included in production, employment and other spheres of economic and social life when international trade expands.**

The UNCTAD report does not explicitly examine inclusion and exclusion in relation to persons with disabilities, but its approach lends itself to examining the barriers that persons with disabilities are likely to face in engaging in trade related activities (e.g. the risk of remaining confined to insecure and low-paying occupations). It could help therefore in the identification of policies to facilitate the structural changes required to enable their inclusion on terms that respect their basic rights on an equal basis with others.

## The World Bank's 2020 World Development Report

The 2020 World Bank World Development Report (WDR) titled "Trading for Development in the Age of GVCs" (the 2020 WDR thereafter) conceptualizes inclusive trade mainly as a trade regime that provides low-income countries with the opportunity to progressively integrate into complex GVCs and produce more advanced manufactures and services, in this way catching up with richer countries.

Box 1 describes GVCs and the variety of employment relationships that they entail. The 2020 WDR discusses inclusion with respect to countries or firms, and less in terms of disadvantaged groups and individuals. It recognizes, however, that, within countries, the gains from GVCs are not equally distributed, for instance across categories of workers (e.g. by skill or gender).

The 2020 WDR strikes a more optimistic tone than the UNCTAD report on the potential for GVCs to boost growth, create better jobs, and reduce poverty in the aggregate, and devotes limited attention to possible negative consequences for specific population segments within countries. It argues that for many low-income countries, the expansion of GVCs until 2008 has been 'revolutionary'.

GVC trade exhibits two features that distinguish it from traditional trade and matter for development: hyper-specialization and durable firm-to-firm relationships. 'Hyperspecialization' is defined as the process by which firms in a country specialize in a specific task or part, and do not have to produce the whole product, and is associated with the fragmentation of both production processes and knowledge. According to the report, these are positive features that allow firms to raise productivity and income, and promote the diffusion of technology and access to capital and inputs along chains. All these potential benefits can be realized "provided that developing countries undertake deeper reforms and industrial countries pursue open, predictable policies".

Echoing the UNCTAD report, the 2020 WDR acknowledges that the gains from GVC participation are not distributed equally between and within countries. It notes that inequalities arise in the distribution of firm markups across countries, mainly in favour of large corporations that outsource parts and tasks to LMICs. Inequalities also arise in the distribution of capital and labour, between skilled and unskilled workers as well as male and female workers. The report also observes that GVCs exacerbate problems of tax avoidance and tax competition between potential host countries, and that tax revenue losses from profit shifting can be substantial.

The policy prescriptions following from this analysis largely involve domestic policies to enhance LMICs' integration in global markets. These include attracting foreign direct investment, promoting further liberalization, policies to upgrade small and medium

enterprises (SMEs) participation in GVCs, improving transportation and communication infrastructure and introducing competition in these services. Access to childcare to support jobs for women, training programmes for youth; and extension services for smallholders are identified as the complementary policies that could promote inclusion and sustainability.

In sum, the policy prescriptions of the 2020 WDR are more weighted towards what the UNCTAD report calls measures aimed at 'making markets work better'. They deal less with the reforms that would be required to address structural inequalities and the power of large corporations. Moreover, while the 2020 WDR praises the benefits associated with the fragmentation of production and knowledge, it does not pay sufficient attention to the risks associated with the fragmentation of employment relations, particularly for workers in the lowest tiers of value chains, where persons with disabilities are likely to cluster.

The 2020 WDR report calls for greater technical and financial assistance to help low-income countries improve general compliance with labour standards. This would benefit all workers in vulnerable employment categories, including workers with disabilities. In addition, the report has general policy recommendations aimed at micro-entrepreneurs and small holders, which are relevant to disability inclusive trade since persons with disabilities tend to be over-represented in these categories. However, the 2020 WDR does not explicitly discuss how to make GVCs more inclusive for persons with disabilities.

### **Box 1. What are GVCs? And what type of employment relationships do they involve?**

A global value chain breaks up the production process across countries. Firms specialize in a specific task and do not produce the whole product.

GVCs expanded in the 1990s and 2000s. Parts and components began crisscrossing the globe as firms looked for efficiencies wherever they could find them. That expansion has slowed down since the financial crisis of 2008. The emergence of shorter supply chains within a region seems to be the current trend.

Most countries participate in GVCs but in different ways. High income and large emerging countries participate in complex GVCs producing advanced and innovative manufactures and services. By contrast, many countries in Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America still produce commodities for further processing in other countries or engage in limited manufacturing.

Fragmented workers involving a combination of permanent, temporary, and casual workers can be found across most tiers of value chains, from retail, through distribution, logistics and services, to production and inputs.

GVCs often involve subcontracting down to lower tier suppliers to keep down costs and provide requisite inputs. This can include home-based workers and small-holder producers, which often supply through intermediaries, but are nevertheless integrated into value chains.

Employment relationships can vary greatly in an environment of fragmented work. Only some workers (most likely at upper value chain tiers) will be in permanent employment with regular contracts and basic protections and close ties with employers. Casual, seasonal and temporary workers have fewer employer ties and are likely to move between employers. The use of labour contractors facilitates variation in the number of workers at any point and reduces the obligations (and costs) of the main suppliers. The lowest tiers can even include coercive practices, where workers are forced to work through indebtedness for example (e.g. modern day slavery).

Source: World Bank (2020) on GVCs and Barrientos (2019) on employment relationships in GVCs

## WTO and OECD's 2019 & 2022 Aid for Trade Global Reviews

Since the establishment of the AfT initiative in 2005, the WTO and OECD have jointly published several Aid for Trade Global Reviews (AFTGRs), which draw on extensive stakeholder consultations and data gathering that take place every two years at the WTO in Geneva. This exercise is aimed at taking stock of progress as well as challenges in the implementation of the Aid for Trade agenda. It also aims to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation, so that “developing countries can capitalise on the opportunities of international trade” (OECD, n.d). The Global Review provides regular updates on aid-for-trade flows and patterns, as well as in-depth analyses of topical issues. It reflects the views of partner countries as well as bilateral, multilateral donor agencies and providers of South-South co-operation, and is therefore a good way to gauge emerging priorities and future directions of the trade donor community.

**The latest two AFTGRs** (WTO and OECD, 2019, 2022) **signal a greater concern for themes of inclusion, sustainable trade and the economic empowerment of women and youth**, and are briefly reviewed here. The 2019 and 2022 AFTGRs share the same notion of inclusive trade and economic empowerment. This is discussed mainly in relation to women, youth, and their involvement in entrepreneurial activities. Economic empowerment is largely understood as access to skills, knowledge, finance and other productive resources that enable participation in markets, especially through integration into GVCs. The focus is on labour participation per se. Only limited attention is given to the conditions required to ensure that paid employment takes place under decent conditions and is conducive to empowerment (e.g. the jobs that are generated by trade are secure and well-paid).

### Box 2. What is Aid for Trade?

The AfT initiative was launched by the World Trade Organization (WTO) at its Sixth Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong in 2005 with the objective of helping LMICs, and particularly least developed countries, to expand their trade capacity and benefit from trade agreements.

The Aid for Trade initiative signifies an important normative change among trade and development policymakers: it reflects the acknowledgement that trade liberalisation and expansion on its own is unlikely to benefit people in LMICs, unless it is accompanied by substantial investment and complementary policies to address binding constraints and attenuate costs. This can only be addressed through robust and well-structured trade-related development assistance.

The WTO explains on its website: “Many developing countries face a range of supply-side and trade-related infrastructure obstacles which constrains their ability to engage in international trade. The WTO-led Aid-for-Trade Initiative encourages developing country governments and donors to recognize the role that trade can play in development. In particular, the initiative seeks to mobilize resources to address the trade-related constraints identified by developing and least-developed countries.”

AfT supports recipient countries efforts in four main policy areas:

1. Trade policy and regulations (e.g. technical and institutional support to formulate trade policy, participate in negotiations, implement agreements and comply with standards);
2. Economic infrastructure (e.g. investing in roads, ports, telecommunications, energy and other infrastructure to better connect domestic and international markets);
3. Building productive capacity (e.g. investment in industries and specific sectors so that countries are able to diversify domestic production and exports);
4. Adjustment assistance (e.g. help to cushion transition costs from trade liberalisation such as potential loss of fiscal revenue or declining terms of trade).

AfT directed at economic infrastructure tends to account for the largest share of investments.

A variety of instruments and modalities are used to deliver AfT, including concessional loans, grants, pooled funds, trust funds and channelling funds through multilateral institutions.

Many studies and evaluations, including the Global Aid for Trade Review process itself, have demonstrated positive impacts of AfT on economic performance such as exports, GDP and the investment climate. However, there is growing acknowledgment that the design and implementation of AfT programmes need to strengthen linkages between trade expansion and inclusive development dimensions.

Sources: WTO (n.d); Basnett et al (2012)

The 2019 AFTGR titled 'Economic Diversification and Empowerment' notes an emerging consensus among WTO members and other trade stakeholders on the relevance of economic diversification and economic empowerment as core inter-linked objectives in the promotion of development through trade. There is a two-way interaction between these two objectives: economic diversification increases opportunities for economic empowerment; and economic empowerment through skills and training is essential for economic diversification, leading, in turn, to higher productivity and employment generation.

In the chapter on empowering youth for sustainable trade, for instance, the main argument is that improved youth skills and innovation promote SMEs competitiveness and exports ("Youth skills can help companies go global" 2019: p216) and, in turn, internationally competitive SMEs provide more and better jobs for young people. The emphasis is on promotion of skills that match labour market requirements and improved access to finance as essential ingredients to help young people find gainful employment in small firms, as workers or entrepreneurs.

Many of these policy recommendations could in principle apply to youth with disabilities, but there is nothing in the discussion that concretely addresses the specific barriers they face. Similarly, the review discusses how to better integrate gender equality principles into AfT support to infrastructural investment such as transport, energy, water and sanitation. It recommends measures to address women's disproportionate share of unpaid domestic work and to ensure women's safety in public spaces. However, no reference is made to issues of wider accessibility of infrastructural projects, from the perspective of women or youth with disabilities. Universally accessible transport and related infrastructure would greatly enhance the opportunities of persons with disabilities as workers and consumers in a country. It could have the added benefit of encouraging persons with disabilities to undertake international tourism, thus supporting the recovery of one of the worst hit trade sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 2022 AFTGR titled 'Empowering Connected, Sustainable Trade' returns on the themes of women's empowerment, youth and sustainable development, signaling an even stronger commitment among recipient countries and donors to these priorities. This commitment is reflected in a significant increase in AfT disbursements from bilateral donors towards programmes including gender equality objectives, for example. However, projects specifically addressing barriers affecting either women or men with disabilities do not seem to feature under any of the key AfT categories of economic infrastructure, productive capacity or trade regulations. One of the special themes of the report is about inclusive digital connectivity and e-commerce. These are seen as important vehicles for

reducing social exclusion among women and youth. The discussion of this theme, too, however, neglects to consider how the digital world could be made more inclusive and safer from the perspective of persons with disabilities.

### World Vision and DFAT's 2019 Report

To our knowledge, the World Vision and Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Inclusive Trade 2019 Report titled "Extending the benefits of trade to reduce poverty" is the first report to explicitly and concretely examine how trade can be designed and implemented to reduce barriers for persons with disabilities. It constitutes an important first step towards developing a well-articulated policy agenda for disability inclusive trade.

The report conceptualizes inclusive trade as the process of "empowering and including socially disadvantaged groups in varying forms of trade". It provides practical examples on programmes and projects for reaching the most marginalized and remote communities. Its disability inclusive AfT Agenda is described in terms of three key elements:

1. ensuring that AfT investments, particularly those related to economic infrastructure such as roads, bridges and ICT, comply with universal design principles, enabling participation and autonomy for all;
2. promoting the production, trade and widespread use of assistive technologies, by increasing awareness of market opportunities, working to reduce the costs of specific products and supporting LMICs in their efforts to improve accessibility;
3. building the trade capacity of persons with disabilities through skills training, improving their access to banking systems and other services, as well as conducting ad hoc studies to identify specific barriers that persons with disabilities face in accessing employment.

**Promoting better inclusion of persons with disabilities in trade related processes must involve not only enabling their access to better earning opportunities, but also according them greater voice and substantive representation in trade policy decision-making.** With regard to awareness-raising efforts, the report argues that these should not target only workers and entrepreneurs with disabilities. They should be also aimed at trade officials and decision-makers to ensure they are well informed about constraints as well as aspirations of persons with disabilities. The report stresses that involving disabled people's organizations and persons with disabilities, at every stage of trade negotiations as well as in AfT implementation and evaluation, is vital for a truly inclusive trade system.



To conclude, the reports reviewed in this section help to understand prevailing policy stances and narratives on inclusive trade. These reports point to growing attention in the trade community to the empowerment of women and youth, and to the potential for digital technologies to transform international trade.

So far, however, disability inclusion has received little or no attention. Disability in these reports is at best listed as one among several possible sources of disadvantage, and as a factor intersecting with either youth or gender to determine forms of adverse incorporation in, or exclusion from global markets. Some of the recommendations in these reports are in principle relevant for the objective of making GVCs more inclusive for workers with disabilities. However, the circumstances experienced by workers or consumers with disabilities are rarely examined in detail. With the exception of the World Vision and DFAT's report, the flagship reports examined here pay lip service to the barriers affecting persons with disabilities and do not offer concrete suggestions on how trade policies can be designed and implemented to reduce such barriers.

## 1.4 The inclusion of disability rights in trade agreements

After reviewing a selection of flagship reports on inclusive trade in the previous section, this section turns to another set of key trade policy documents: trade agreements. Trade agreements have an important role to play in shaping the policies that are implemented on the ground, both at the national and the international level. They can shape the extent to which trade-related policies protect and promote the rights of the most disadvantaged, including persons with disabilities.

Trade between countries is regulated through a complex web of agreements at the multilateral, regional and bilateral level. Regional and bilateral agreements have risen in number and scope over the years, and most current agreements go beyond reciprocal tariff concessions. They include both goods and services, and extend to rules on investments, competition, government procurement, labour and the environment, with the aim of furthering economic integration. Provisions on so-called 'non-trade objectives' are increasingly included in these agreements and create obligations for member states, or allow exceptions to terms of the agreement, with the aim to protect disadvantaged groups from any harm that lowering trade barriers may cause. The expectation is that the integration of 'non-trade issues' in trade treaties may encourage economic policies that more forcefully protect human rights and the environment (Hafner-Burton, 2005; Hernández-Truyol and Powell, 2009).

The text of trade agreements in all its intricate details, thus, matters: **when trading rules are appropriately formulated, they can be stepping stones for the formulation of trade policies that are inclusive.** The findings of two recent reviews (Ruiz et al., 2022 and Bahri, 2022) on the inclusion of disability in trade agreements over the last few decades suggest that **the ways in which existing agreements refer to persons with disabilities are far from satisfactory.**

Assessing whether a trade agreement makes adequate reference to the rights of persons with disabilities involves two steps. The first step is to examine whether the trade agreement in question mentions persons with disabilities at all. The second, and more important, step, as suggested by Ruiz et al. (2022), is to ask which framing and perspectives on disability are reflected in the text of the agreement (e.g. an interactional or medical perspective). In other words, simply mentioning disability in a policy document is no guarantee of inclusive policies. As stressed earlier in this chapter, it is terms of inclusion that matter.

Ruiz et al (2022) analyse how disability is referenced in 518 preferential trade agreements negotiated between 1948 and 2020. They explore how these references relate to broader debates on the rights of persons with disabilities in global governance. In particular, they ask whether these references signal a shift over time from a medical to a social or interactional understanding of disability, following the adoption in 2006 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which is the most important law instrument sanctioning the protection and promotion of human rights of persons with disabilities to date.<sup>3</sup>

Their review usefully identifies five main types of inclusion of disability and examines how each of these modes align with the goals of the CRPD.

Type 1 regards clauses that include disability as a category in the non-discrimination provisions. This approach comes close to a social and human rights approach to disability, and reflect CRPD principles. Yet, non-discrimination clauses remain the rarest form of inclusion in trade agreements.

Type 2 is in the form of guarantees that allow workers in state parties to live in, and move between states while accruing and maintaining disability pensions. References to the transferability of social protection are evidently valuable for disabled workers. However, they focus solely on workers, and fail to acknowledge persons with disabilities who do not or cannot participate in the formal labour market. Furthermore, by listing disability along with age, disease and death, these clauses tend to reinforce negative perceptions of disability as a state of incapacity.

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3 A detailed account of CRPD is provided in Chapter 3.

Type 3 regards clauses that promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities outright. These clauses were first introduced in the Lomé Convention, a trade agreement between African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and the European Community that first came into force in the 1970s and has a strong development component. These clauses reflect a vision of people with disabilities as capable of active participation and offering a valuable perspective to trade and development projects, as opposed to relegating persons with disabilities to a category that merely needs protection. These clauses thus align with the CRPD but are only reproduced in a handful of trade agreements subsequent to the Lomé Convention. To this day, Type 3 modality of inclusion, much like Type 1, continues to account for a negligible fraction of all disability references.

Type 4 is about calls on the state parties to cooperate on policymaking around disability. Ruiz et al (2022) observe that, in existing agreements, these calls mostly relate to issues of social welfare or rehabilitation, and hence tend to align with a medical model of disability, which aims to resolve disabilities as a defect within an individual, rather than to adapt the social and physical environment to remove barriers to a person's ability. There are exceptions to this approach, but, in general, the language in these clauses frames disability as an inherent and adverse characteristic of certain groups rather than a social construction resulting from unequal power relations.

Type 5 regards clauses that give some, or all parties in the agreement the right to make exceptions or exclusions to the main provisions of the agreement, to protect vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities. This clause was first included in the Tokyo Round Code on Government Procurement Agreement (GPA) of 1979. Since then, it has been reproduced and imitated many times in subsequent agreements and is the type of non-trade disability prerogative that appears most frequently. Ruiz et al (2022) observe that this GPA clause reproduces a medical understanding of disability and risks exacerbating discrimination rather than reducing it. They note, for instance, that the language in which these regulatory exceptions are often expressed permits the continuation of segregated work arrangements for disabled persons, and their marginalization in isolated spaces (e.g. mention of 'goods and services of disabled persons' and 'sheltered workshops').

In sum, despite some differences, **these types of inclusion mostly reflect a medical understanding (or model) of disability.** Provisions regarding the rights of persons with disabilities remain limited in scope. Ruiz et al (2022) conclude that governments seem to have generally opted for replicating a minimal disability provision template limited to regulatory exceptions and borrowed from a specific agreement, the WTO's Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA). **They have rarely added additional clauses to address disability more comprehensively, in ways that are better aligned with the obligations enshrined in the CRPD.**

It is important to note that general social provisions, such as commitments to international labour standards and human rights, can equally create the foundations for trade policies that promote the rights of persons with disabilities, even when persons with disabilities are not explicitly mentioned in trade agreements. This point is made by Bahri (2022) who, accordingly, considers implicit as well as explicit provisions in her review of trade agreements. In other words, she also considers examples of agreements that might indirectly contribute to disability inclusion, by integrating commitments to uphold relevant existing International Labour Organization (ILO) and United Nations conventions and/or address issues of broad relevance to people's full enjoyment of their rights such as decent work and universal access to health.

Bahri (2022), however, notes that existing clauses and provisions tend to be defined only in vague terms, are mainly framed as best endeavour promises and are mostly non-binding. Echoing Ruiz et al (2022), Bahri (2022) suggests that disability provisions should be better integrated throughout all chapters of trade agreements, and have more precise language. Importantly, she stresses **the need for robust institutional frameworks and adequate financial resources to support implementation and enforcement, to be agreed at the negotiation stage.**

## 1.5 Working definition of disability inclusive trade

The discussion in this chapter highlighted various themes and perspectives in the policy debate on inclusive trade as they relate to the rights of persons with disabilities. This helps to contextualize the working definition of 'disability inclusive trade' that this report will adopt. This section concludes by starting to sketch key elements of such definition.

One emerging message in this chapter has been that the mere participation of persons with disabilities in trade-related activities, and/or their brief mention in key trade documents, does not necessarily indicate that trade policy is inclusive of persons with disabilities. It is the terms of inclusion of persons with disabilities that matter.

This report understands inclusive policies to mean policies that aim to overcome marginalization and disadvantage, and that contribute to the realization of equal rights for everyone. In pursuing this objective, attention must be provided first to those who enjoy the least rights (Bhaduri and Elson, 2016).

In line with this understanding, **disability inclusive trade** in this report is defined in terms of the **quality of employment** that trade can generate for persons with disabilities, not just number of jobs. Disability inclusive trade is also defined in terms of the **goods, services and environmental features** that trade can make accessible and affordable for

persons with disabilities Finally, disability inclusive trade must be understood not only in terms of equal participation in economic activities but also in terms of **adequate political representation**. The economic and political dimensions are interconnected.

Thus, reducing barriers and asymmetries to promote better inclusion of persons with disability in international trade requires a comprehensive policy agenda, at both national and international levels. The substantive participation of persons with disabilities and organizations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) in trade policy decision-making is crucial for shaping such a policy agenda.

The next chapters further develop these concepts and themes.

## 2 Persons with disabilities, inequalities and barriers

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the main inequalities and barriers faced by persons with disabilities in the labour market as well as policies to reduce them. It sets the stage with the international policy framework set by the SDGs and the CRPD in relation to employment. It then describes the considerable socioeconomic and employment inequalities that persons with disabilities experience and their drivers, including barriers to, and within, the workplace. Finally, it reviews key national policies that have been used to reduce employment inequalities.

### 2.2 International policy initiatives and legal instruments

The United Nations (UN) have adopted a human rights perspective on disability. The UN CRPD is a global human rights treaty adopted in 2006. The CRPD aims “to promote, protect, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.” It has been ratified by 185 countries as of October 2022. There are two broad components to the implementation of the CRPD. The first consists in adopting laws and policies in line with the provisions of the CRPD and the second includes non-legal strategies towards advocacy and social change. Both aim to promote the full participation of persons with disabilities in society by mainstreaming disability in development strategies (United Nations 2019).

The CRPD recognizes that persons with disabilities include those “who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments” and who encounter barriers which hinder their “full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (Preamble, recital (e) and Article 1).

Additionally, persons with disabilities have also been highlighted in the UN SDGs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs include persons with disabilities explicitly in five SDGs, including education, growth and employment, inequality, accessibility of human settlements, and data, monitoring and accountability.

Many countries adopted national disability legislations and policies for the first time soon after ratifying the CRPD (e.g. Ethiopia) while others modified laws or added new laws to advance equal rights (e.g. Tanzania). Overall, increasingly, national constitutions guarantee equal rights for persons with disabilities and legislations protect adults with disabilities from discrimination in employment. Yet much work remains to be done. Out of all 193 UN member states, 62 % of countries broadly prohibit disability-based employment discrimination, but just over half (52 %) of countries guarantee reasonable accommodation to workers with disabilities (Heymann et al 2021). Similarly, just over half of countries (53 %) do not prohibit pay discrimination or discrimination in promotion/demotion. More efforts are needed to adopt disability-inclusive policies and legislations and to implement them given wide socioeconomic inequalities between persons with and without disabilities.

## 2.3 Socioeconomic inequalities

The continued need to develop and implement effective disability-inclusive policies is shown in stark disability inequalities for a variety of socioeconomic indicators. Such inequalities have been shown in a growing body of evidence in the past decade (United Nations 2019) and recent disaggregation efforts. Thanks to the development of survey instruments to collect internationally comparable data on disability (Altman 2016, Loeb et al 2018, Washington Group-ILO 2019) and the growing adoption of such survey instruments in recent years, it has become possible to disaggregate statistics based on disability for children (UNICEF 2021) and adults (Mitra and Yap 2021, 2022).

**While not all persons with disabilities are poor, research has shown that they are disproportionately represented among the poor.** Several mechanisms link poverty to disability. First, a vicious circle can link disability and poverty (Yeo and Moore 2003). People living in poverty are more likely to suffer from poor diets and malnutrition which is linked to stunting and the onset of health conditions and impairments later in life (Groce et al. 2014). Similarly, poor sanitation and water commonly associated with poverty are linked to various diseases that can cause disability (World Bank 2005; Murray and Lopez 1997). People living in poverty also have less access to quality health care which can worsen underlying health conditions and functional difficulties (Peters et al. 2008).

In reverse, when environments are not accessible, the onset of a disability is likely to lead to lower living standards, poverty and hunger through adverse impacts on education, employment, earnings, and increased expenditures related to disability. For example, **disability may constrain the kind and amount of paid employment a person can do**, lowering income for the individual and the household and potentially resulting in poverty and hunger (Mani et al 2018; Takasaki 2020).

Second, there could be factors that independently determine both disability and poverty (Mitra 2018). Conflicts and natural disasters can simultaneously lead to both disability and poverty. Expensive health care services can drive unmet health care needs leading to the onset of impairments and health conditions while being economically burdensome on households. Third, **persons with disabilities are often burdened with additional costs of living** (Mitra et al 2017) due for example to expenditures relating to health care, transportation, assistive devices and technology, attendant care, and housing adjustments. These additional expenditures are all the higher, the more barriers in the environment. As a result, persons with disabilities often need more income to achieve a given standard of living. If such additional costs of living are not taken into account, poverty assessments based on income or consumption expenditures may underestimate the true extent of poverty among persons with disabilities.

Given the various mechanisms that may link disability and poverty, it is no surprise that **persons with disabilities have been shown to more often experience multiple deprivations in various dimensions of wellbeing** (e.g. inadequate housing conditions, not working, low educational attainment, social isolation). The experience of multiple deprivations is also referred to as multidimensional poverty. There is consistent evidence on the disproportionate risk of persons with disabilities to be multidimensionally poor in both the global north and the global south (United Nations 2019).

Given the economic disadvantage that persons with disabilities often experience, **comprehensive and effective social protection systems** are crucial for their income security and to help with additional costs of living. Social protection programs may be mainstream and/or targeted at persons with disabilities. In LMICs, targeted social protection programs are more scarce than mainstream ones. Social protection systems are also critical to help persons with disabilities enter or stay in employment (ILO 2017).



## 2.4 Employment Inequalities

### 2.4.1 Employment patterns

Persons with disabilities have limited access to labour market opportunities. This is shown by significantly lower employment-population ratios for adults with disabilities (36 %), close to half that of persons without disabilities (60 %) and by a wage gap between persons with and without disability (United Nations 2019). In many countries, the NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) rate is higher among youth with disabilities compared to their nondisabled youth counterparts, in rural areas in particular (ILO 2022).

In LMICs, data on occupations and industries among persons with disabilities are scarce<sup>4</sup>. In high-income countries, there is **ample evidence that persons with disabilities are disproportionately concentrated in low-wage low-skilled non-unionized jobs**. Evidence around the occupations and industries where persons may be overrepresented is more limited: some research suggests that disabled workers are more likely to be in government and other service jobs, manufacturing and manual labour and more often in entry-level jobs (Kaye 2009; Jones 2008).

In LMICs, a significant share of workers are informal workers, i.e. are self-employed, work for a microenterprise, in a firm that is unregistered or their family, or have no written contract with their employers and are not covered by social insurance. Persons with disabilities are more likely to be in informal employment than their non-disabled counterparts (e.g. Mitra and Yap 2021). Persons with disabilities have also been shown to have more difficulties finding paid work in general, whether in the formal or informal sector (United Nations 2019).

As for the location of work, in some countries, disabled workers are more likely than their non-disabled counterparts to work primarily from home, especially among people with mobility impairments, difficulty with self-care, and difficulty going outside alone (e.g. Schur et al 2020 for the US). Home-based work can have benefits for persons with impairments and health conditions that have no access to workplaces due to barriers in the environment, who require frequent breaks from work, need attendant care or need to be close to medical equipment or at home. Employers may be more willing to hire workers with disabilities for home-based positions due to lower concern about workplace accommodations and attitudes of supervisors and co-workers. At the same time, home-based positions have disadvantages. For instance, compliance with labour standards is more difficult and working from home may lead to social isolation.

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4 In one study, the share of persons in manufacturing and the share of women in managerial positions have been shown to be similar across disability status (Mitra and Yap (2021)).

## 2.4.2 Drivers of labour market outcomes

There are many factors that can explain the worse labour market outcomes of persons with disabilities. Due to barriers in the general environment, adults with disabilities have often lower educational attainment than adults without disabilities. This association results in part from lower school attendance among children with disabilities, which has been shown for many LMICs (UNICEF 2021). Lower school attendance results from barriers such as roads and transport and because schools suffer from physical barriers or lack of teacher training (WHO-World Bank, 2011).

In addition, persons with disabilities experience an array of environmental barriers (Box 3) that compound difficulties in accessing paid employment and decent jobs (WHO-World Bank 2011). If persons with disabilities cannot access public transport, they will not look for work, knowing that they have no means to get to the workplace. Health care facilities may not be accessible (WHO-World Bank 2011), so persons with disabilities may not receive the services they need to be able to work. The impact on environmental barriers is further compounded by limited access to assistive devices and personal assistance. In 35 LMICs, only 19 % of women with seeing difficulties use glasses and 2 % of women with hearing difficulties use hearing aids (Mitra and Yap 2021, WHO-UNICEF ,2022).

Negative attitudes, low expectations, including self-expectations, and discrimination may also take place on the labour supply side. Through negative attitudes and low expectations, household members may provide an environment that is not conducive to a person with disabilities' entry into the labour force. In India, for example, negative attitudes are pervasive not only among nondisabled employers, but also among family members and disabled people themselves (Mitra and Sambamoorthi 2008). Negative attitudes may come from implicit bias, from the belief that persons with disabilities are less productive than their nondisabled counterparts or from prejudice and disability stigma (Rohwerder 2019). Persons with disabilities disproportionately report they have been harassed or discriminated against compared to persons without disabilities (Mitra and Yap 2022), and some studies have demonstrated discrimination in hiring (e.g. Amari et al 2018, L'Horty et al 2022).

### Box 3: Environmental factors and employment

Persons with disabilities experience an array of environmental factors on a daily basis that can be barriers or facilitators to employment.

**Physical factors** cover the natural and built environment. If persons with disabilities cannot access infrastructure (sidewalks, roads) and public transport (e.g. train, bus), they will not look for work, knowing that they have no means to get to the workplace.

**Organizational factors** include the systems, services and policies that labor market stakeholders (e.g. employers, government) may have in place and that can affect employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. These include for instance anti-discrimination laws and how they are implemented.

**Attitudinal factors** are about attitudes of persons who interact with persons with disabilities, including both family members and employers. For instance, low expectations among family members and prejudice by employers could make finding employment challenging.

**Information and communication factors** relate to how information is shared. For instance, a low print size or a speaker not facing their collaborators may prevent people with seeing or hearing difficulties from accessing information.

**Technology factors** relate to the extent to which technologies are accessible. For instance, when websites are not compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, they are not compatible with assistive technologies and may prevent persons with disabilities from accessing digital platforms and similar resources.

Source: Authors' compilation based on literature review.

## 2.5 Employment policies for disability inclusion

This section focuses on recommendations by selected international organizations for improving the labour market outcomes of persons with disabilities (OHCHR 2020; United Nations 2019; WHO-World Bank 2011). Interventions may be mainstream (for the general population but aiming to also include persons with disabilities) or targeted at persons with disabilities. Ideally, both interventions are necessary.

Article 27 of the CRPD mandates that States recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by working freely in a work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible (ILO 2015). States Parties also undertake to take appropriate steps, including those specifically listed in the CRPD, to safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work including: prohibit discrimination related to employment, promote the employment of persons with disabilities, and ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities in the workplace.

The law provides the basis for the removal of barriers and discrimination and regulate the access to employment and equal labour rights for persons with disabilities. Increasingly, countries have adopted antidiscrimination laws that aim to reduce employment discrimination, increase access to the workplace, and change perceptions about the ability of persons with disabilities to be productive workers (Heymann et al 2021). The scope of such legislations and the extent to which they are implemented vary greatly. Too often, such legislations are poorly enforced and accountability on their implementation is limited. This is a concern that has been expressed by policy analysts (e.g. Aldersey and Rutherford Turnbull 2011; Robinson and Fisher 2023; Wickenden et al 2020) and that can lead to a gap between the policy on paper and the reality experienced by persons with disabilities.

Some countries also require affirmative action in hiring of persons with disabilities while others have quotas (or reservations) on the employment of persons with disabilities in the public and/or the private sector. Quotas are in more than 100 countries and vary greatly in their scope, levels, and enforcement mechanisms (ILO 2019). A quota requires employers to set a number or a percentage for persons of a particular group. In some countries, the employer pays a fine if the quota is not met and the fine feeds a fund to support related initiatives such as the training of persons with disabilities. The idea is that without quotas, disabled workers would not be hired due to prejudice or misconceptions around their productivity. The effects of quotas on the employment of persons with disabilities have rarely been carefully evaluated. While quotas are sometimes considered to be an outdated policy that is not necessary alongside an antidiscrimination legislation and not truly inclusive, some countries use both an antidiscrimination legislation and a quota system as pillars of their disability and employment policy (e.g. France (Revillard 2023)).

Governments can also boost employment opportunities for persons with disabilities by making mainstream employment related services and programs accessible to persons with disabilities (e.g. vocational training and job search services, job creation programs). Governments can also hire persons with disabilities and use procurement processes and policies that encourage or require the employment of persons with disabilities. To these effects, Ministries should dedicate resources to disability inclusion and track expenditures (OHCHR 2020).

Ministries of Labour, employer federations and OPDs should have a range of awareness-raising efforts (OHCHR 2020). They should address stereotypes and prejudice against persons with disabilities in employment and reach various stakeholders including: senior management, recruitment professionals and agencies among public and private corporations, banking and financial services.

Ministries of Labour, employer federations and OPDs should also collaborate to offer training on inclusion in employment (OHCHR 2020). This should be offered to public officials responsible for employment policy, senior managers, employment services and human resources professionals in the public and private sectors.

Employers should hire persons with disabilities and provide reasonable accommodations. To that effect, employers need to have supervisors and human resources personnel who are trained and aware with respect to reasonable accommodations and non-discrimination more broadly. They should have disability management policies in place to facilitate job retention and return-to-work for persons who acquire an impairment or health condition, including for persons with mental health conditions.

In some countries, sheltered work programs provide employment in separate facilities for persons with disabilities who are perceived to be unable to compete in the open labour market. However, sheltered workshops may perpetuate stigma and isolation and feed a charity perspective towards persons with disabilities.

Supported employment programs are different in that they are designed to help integrate persons with disabilities into the open labour market. Supported employment provides a variety of support services that are tailored to the individual's needs and reduce the barriers they face, including job coaches, transportation, assistive technology, specialized job training, and individually tailored supervision. Supported employment was developed in the formal sector in high-income countries as part of government-funded programs and has been shown to be successful for persons with severe disabilities (e.g. Marshall et al 2014 for persons with mental disorders). Despite an extensive body of evidence showing its positive impact, supported employment is not widespread, in part due to lack of funding.

To improve labour market outcomes among persons with disabilities, a participatory and intersectional approach to policy making and programming is key. The Ministry of Labour, in collaboration with other relevant ministries, should ensure a systematic and diverse representation of persons with disabilities in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies (OHCHR 2020). For instance, for Haiti, Oriol, a former permanent secretary for the integration of persons with disabilities, points out the importance of a collaborative and participatory approach to policy making by partnering with a variety of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, the private sector and the disability community (Oriol and English 2023). Some people experience further marginalization in the labour market due to their disability status in interaction with other social markers such as age, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, and immigration status.. An intersectional approach is thus needed to assess and address the complex systemic barriers that may be at play.

Finally, governments have a role to play to produce disability disaggregated data on employment and to monitor access to public programs by persons with disabilities. The Washington Group-International Labour Organization Labour Force Survey disability module has a battery of questions on respondents' perceptions about their environments and are steps in this direction (Washington Group-ILO 2019).

## 3 An analytical framework for understanding the impact of trade policies on persons with disabilities

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a framework to understand the multiple ways in which trade expansion and greater global market integration can affect the well-being of persons with disabilities, and to identify the conditions that need to be met to ensure that trade is conducive to the realization of their economic and social rights.<sup>5</sup> Only when these conditions are met can trade be considered disability inclusive as explained in Chapter 1, this report understands trade policies in broad terms, to include not only tariffs and export promotion, but also measures regarding investment, services liberalization and other trade-related regulations and complementary policies.

Greater integration in international markets, and policy reforms associated with trade expansion, affect the distribution of income and resources in a country. The effects on inequality and the well-being of its people can be either positive or negative. These distributional effects, on aggregate, will depend on a country's economic structure (e.g. whether a country is relatively abundant in natural resources, the skill composition of its labour force, its stage of development, and the composition of its exports and imports) and other institutional factors (e.g. the extent and quality of social protection and social services). These effects will be felt differently by different social groups, and different groups of women and men, depending on their capacity to access economic resources, their different needs (for example, for health care and nutrition), and the barriers they may face when trying to earn a livelihood or use public services.

As described in Chapter 2, persons with disabilities often experience multiple deprivations. In particular, they are more likely to live in poverty, have more limited access to education and quality health care, face higher costs of living, and struggle to

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5 These rights include: the right to work as well as the right to enjoy just and favourable conditions of work; the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food and housing; and the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

find well-paid and secure employment. In many instances, these problems tend to be exacerbated for women. **These inequalities mean that the capacity of persons with disabilities to benefit from trade opportunities, as well as their ability to adjust to possible negative effects from trade liberalization, are likely to be limited, unless an appropriate combination of policy measures is put in place.**

The framework proposed in this chapter draws on approaches commonly used in the trade and inequality literature (e.g. UNCTAD, 2010; Fontana, 2009), and considers three main channels through which trade-related changes in prices, production structures and regulations can variously affect different households and individuals in an economy: the employment channel, the consumption channel and the public provision channel. The following sections consider each channel in turn, and draw inferences on the likely implications of various trade-related changes for persons with disabilities. Within each channel, in a first step, we describe changes that affect the well-being of all persons in general, including persons with disabilities, in their roles as workers, consumers and users of public services. In a second step, we focus on aspects that are of specific relevance to persons with disabilities. A separate section illustrates trends in digital technologies and trade as they manifest themselves through the three channels. The three channels are represented in Figure 1, together with digitalization, which is represented as an underlying process.

## 3.2 The Employment Channel

### Effects on different categories of workers

Trade expansion and greater market integration lead to changes in a country's structure of production, with sectors producing for export likely to expand and sectors sensitive to import competition likely to contract. As a result, while some jobs are created, other jobs are destroyed. This, in turn, causes changes in the level and distribution of employment across different categories of workers employed with different intensities by different sectors, depending on skill, employment status (e.g. wage work or self-employment), gender and other characteristics. For example, the growth of export-oriented garment production in several LMICs over the last few decades has benefitted women's employment, because garment sectors in most parts of the world tend to disproportionately employ female workers.<sup>6</sup>

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6 However these gains have occurred only in countries specializing in labour-intensive manufacturing, and the jobs available to women tend to remain in low-skill positions with limited promotion prospects



Trade affects not only the quantity of employment in a country, but also its quality, often in contradictory ways. Trade-related changes in the regulatory environment (e.g. enforcement of labour standards, rules on government procurement), as well as the economic volatility frequently associated with production for international markets, are likely to affect the quality and security of employment differently for various groups of workers and producers, with small-scale producers and low-skill workers in the lowest tiers of GVCs often bearing the brunt.

There is agreement in the literature (Milberg and Winkler 2013, World Bank 2020, Barrientos 2019) that when a country expands participation in GVCs, this can lead to, but does not necessarily guarantee, improvements in wages, working conditions and rights for workers. As noted in earlier chapters, employment along GVCs involves a combination of permanent, temporary, and casual workers under a variety of contractual arrangements (Rossi 2013, Barrientos 2019). A 'high road' trajectory for permanent and regular workers, who benefit from higher pay, enhanced working conditions and basic protections, can coexist with a 'low road' trajectory for casual and temporary workers, who frequently endure exploitative terms of employment at the bottom of the chain. Labour casualization and subcontracting allow suppliers to juggle pressures from international buyers while at the same time keeping down costs. However, it can result in further erosion of labour rights for vulnerable categories of workers, such as industrial home-based workers and smallholder agriculture producers.

### **Trade and the employment of persons with disabilities**

An important question is where workers with disabilities are likely to be found in this complex web of employment relations. This determines how persons with disabilities are affected by trade. Data on employment of persons with disabilities in trade-oriented sectors are extremely sparse. However, given what we know about the limited inclusion of persons with disabilities in labour markets overall, and their high concentration in informal precarious jobs in LMICs (Chapter 2), it is plausible to assume that many of them risk remaining confined to the most insecure forms of employment generated by trade, and excluded from good quality jobs.

For example, in many LMICs, one of the categories in which workers with disabilities are disproportionately represented is subcontracted home-based industrial work. A recent study found that in Rwanda, Costa Rica and Mongolia, the percentage of workers with disabilities working from home were almost double that of those with no disabilities (ILO 2021a). These workers tend to be engaged in tasks such as hand-made stitching, embroidery and handicrafts for different supply chains in the garment, electronics and houseware industries. They are often given the raw materials necessary to carry out the task but may be responsible for other production costs. Their earnings tend to be low,

and, because the majority of homeworkers are registered as self-employed, they are rarely covered by social security legislation (ILO, 2021a). They may face occupational safety and health risks, from handling tools and chemicals or other ergonomic hazards causing musculoskeletal disorders, and have less access to training than those who work outside the home, hence limiting their career prospects. Many homeworkers lack a general awareness of their legal rights, have difficulty in organizing and suffer from social isolation (ILO, 2021a). Yet, home-based industrial work can still constitute an attractive option for workers with disabilities: it allows them to work from a space that is better adapted to their access needs, given that transportation systems, public spaces, factories, stores and offices do not always comply with universal accessibility standards. In sum, working from home could be positive for workers with disabilities, but only if it is not the result of a lack of other options, due to labour market segmentation, discrimination and other environmental barriers.

Similarly, in agriculture, workers with disabilities are likely to predominate among poor smallholder farmers. They would often lack legal or social recognition, limiting access to credit and other resources, and be vulnerable to exploitation by intermediaries trying to buy their produce on adverse terms. They may face additional barriers in accessing extension services as well as other mainstream training and support programmes otherwise available to smallholders (Aranda-Jan, 2021). For these reasons, without well-targeted policy support, they would find it difficult to become independently involved in GVCs.

### **How can trade improve employment outcomes for persons with disabilities?**

As this brief discussion suggests, improving terms of inclusion of workers with disabilities in trade-related jobs would require concerted policy action on several fronts. It would require measures to enhance terms and conditions of work in occupations and sectors where persons with disabilities already work (e.g. better protection of informal workers' rights), but also measures to increase access of persons with disabilities to more secure and well remunerated jobs in higher value-added segments of GVC (e.g. managerial positions in ICT or green industries), thus widening their options. Governments, private companies and civil society organizations (such as trade unions and OPDs) have a role to play in promoting these measures.

With regard to improving working conditions in occupations where persons with disabilities already work, policies to support informal micro-entrepreneurs and small producers in participating in GVCs should focus on the main barriers that they themselves identify. These often include multiple interdependent constraints related to entrepreneurship skills, financing and infrastructure requiring integrated packages of services to be specifically tailored to their needs. In recent years, a number of programmes

have started to recognize and address some of these issues, but remain limited in scope (examples are described in section 4.1). Governments have a leading role to play in guaranteeing the protection of disabled workers' rights, including by extending social protection coverage to informal workers and supporting their organizations. Lead firms in global supply chains can also make a significant contribution, for example by implementing private compliance initiatives to improve terms and conditions of work for small scale suppliers with disabilities (a few initiatives in this area are also described in section 4.1).

With regard to widening the options of workers with disabilities, it is important to keep in mind, first of all, that, due to disabled workers' constrained opportunities in the formal labour market and their position of socio-economic disadvantage, informal self-employment is for many the only option, and not a choice. For this reason, policies to enable home-based workers and other micro-entrepreneurs to move into waged jobs in larger enterprises might be more conducive to their better terms of inclusion than programmes aimed exclusively at micro-entrepreneurship skills. In large enterprises, compliance with labour standards and universal accessibility standards is likely to be easier to monitor and enforce (stakeholder interview).

In sum, breaking the persistent barriers that workers disabilities face in relation to accessing trade-related decent jobs, requires a wide range of both macro and micro level policies. These policies would include, for example, promoting diverse skill sets and accessible training-- both prior to entering the labour market and during employment-- as well as programmes to challenge prejudice against disability among employers and the wider public. High occupational safety and health (OSH) standards are needed in all sectors of the economy to both protect workers with disabilities and prevent further disabilities. Policies to improve the productivity of workers with disabilities would also need to include public investment in accessible physical and social infrastructure. Chapter 4 and 5 will return to some of these issues.

### 3.3 The Consumption Channel

#### Effects on different social groups

Trade policies lead to changes in the relative prices of goods and services and can affect the range and quality of products available in a country. These changes impact groups of households depending on their income and consumption patterns. Because persons with and without disabilities may have distinct consumption patterns, and often different decision-making power regarding how to spend their family income, they may be affected

differently. Various types of impairments in interaction with gender, age, ethnicity, and place of residence further affect how persons with disabilities experience trade-induced changes in the cost of living and the availability of goods.

In general, if trade improves the availability and affordability of goods that are essential to general well-being such as food, persons with disabilities will also benefit, particularly if they belong to food-insecure households. In addition, trade can impact the cost and availability of goods that specifically contribute to the well-being of persons with disabilities. This section focuses on food, medicines and assistive technology (AT) as these goods have been identified as important for the disabled community.

### Effects on goods of special significance to persons with disabilities

The way in which trade regulations and standards affect the prices and quality of food and medicines is of special relevance. Affordable food and medicines are essential for adequate nutrition and good health, particularly for people in low-income households who must allocate a significant share of their budget to these goods. Persons with disabilities in LMICs, have been shown to disproportionately suffer from food insecurity (Mitra and Yap 2021). In addition, affordable drugs and treatments might be especially important to persons with disabilities, who tend to experience, on average, poorer levels of health and higher levels of health care needs (WHO 2022). Concerns have been raised in many LMICs about the potential negative effects of agreements such as the WTO's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), which, by eliminating generic competition and creating monopoly rights over new drugs and vaccines, contribute to their high prices. This risks disproportionately affecting people who need them the most. Whether these negative effects can be prevented depends on the extent to which national governments have the power to override provisions in the agreement on public health grounds, and are hence able to secure cheaper medicines, as well as to take measures to foster local capacity in the production of pharmaceuticals.

AT is a category of goods that can be affected by trade regulations, and are of specific significance for persons with disabilities. AT includes a wide range of assistive technologies and related services, from wheelchairs to eyeglasses, hearing aids, prostheses, walking aids, fall detectors, digital devices for communication and monitoring (WHO-UNICEF 2022). The CRPD refers to AT as a human right enabler (e.g. articles 20, 26). AT can enable people to live healthy, independent and dignified lives. It can also improve labour productivity, thus, in principle, allowing workers with disabilities to access more remunerative jobs generated by trade. Yet, most people who need AT products are unable to access them, particularly in LMICs. Several studies have documented large unmet needs for eyeglasses and hearing aids, as well as mobility aids such as canes and crutches (WHO-UNICEF 2022; Mitra and Yap 2022).

Each AT market has its own characteristics with different demand and supply dynamics, different ways of organizing production along GVCs, degrees of competition, tax structures, intellectual property rules, and quality standards. Most AT markets are fragmented. Currently, the bulk of international trade in AT takes place among high-income countries while the number of LMICs in global AT markets is very small (Delgado Ramos and Rizzo Battistella 2019). Many countries in this latter group rely on a mixture of imports, sub-standard local production or donations, and often do not manage to adequately meet their population's needs.

### How can trade improve outcomes for persons with disabilities?

Trade policies could help in addressing bottlenecks between AT supply and AT demand in several ways. For example, removing tariffs on AT products<sup>7</sup> and encouraging South-South trade cooperation could improve economies of scale and affordability for potential users in low-income countries. Aft investment could play an important role in enhancing LMICs' capacity to produce AT that meets local needs. It could also support the development of local skills for producing spare parts and assisting users with service repairs. Moreover, Aft in trade-related infrastructure could be directed at addressing supply chain bottlenecks specific to AT, with the aim of facilitating low-income countries' integration into global AT markets. More details on this policy area are provided in section 4.2.

## 3.4 The Public Provision Channel

Trade policies impact the capacity of the government to provide infrastructure and services vital for the well-being of its population, such as health and social care as well as transportation, water and sanitation. This is because trade policies can affect the level of government revenue as well as the conditions under which public services can be subcontracted to private firms, including foreign ones.

First, a major concern in policy circles has been that trade liberalization reduces tariff revenues, which continues to be an important source of tax revenue for LMICs (Fontana, 2009). If the decline in revenues results, in turn, in lower government spending, this might make it harder to prioritize budgets to maintain public services and infrastructure that support the most disadvantaged (Ortiz and Cummins, 2013). Cuts to social spending are likely to have disproportionately negative effects on persons with disabilities, who tend to rely more on public services, because of their higher healthcare needs and their often

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7 To note that many countries already apply a 0 % tariff on many products, but there is considerable variation across products and countries.

lower incomes (Kooper and Heydt, 2019). In addition, safe and universally accessible transport systems and related infrastructure are of specific relevance for their rights, by enabling better access to schools, homes, workplace as well as leisure (Kett, Cole and Turner, 2020).

Second, trade agreements often include provisions regarding public service privatization and investment liberalization, which can limit a government's ability to regulate basic services for legitimate social goals such as ensuring equitable access to disadvantaged groups. Trade agreements may have clauses on how a government treats foreign firms with respect to the provision of health care or water supply. In some low-income countries, for example, water privatization has had negative distributional effects. A much quoted case is that of Bolivia, where the government privatized the municipal water system, granting a contract to a multinational based in the United States (Sinclair, 2015). It subsequently cancelled the contract because of extensive protests against the company's failure to supply adequate water to poor communities. To the extent that persons with disabilities are over-represented among the poor, they may be disproportionately affected by these changes.

Third, trade policies, when complemented by well targeted technical assistance, can help LMICs achieve greater compliance with universal accessibility standards in, for instance, physical and ICT infrastructure. This can contribute to reduce some of the environmental barriers that persons with disabilities typically face.

A conclusion from this discussion is that it is important to ensure that international trade commitments are aligned with SDG principles and the CRPD. Public provision of quality healthcare and childcare as well as public investments in accessible roads, transport and digital networks have important benefits for well-being and equity broadly. Specifically, these investments can enable persons with disabilities to enjoy good health, education, and political participation and to take new jobs where they can be more productive and fulfilled. This, in turn, can have benefits for all the other workers too.

### 3.5 Digitalization and Trade: Implications for Employment, Consumption and Public Provision

Rapid progress in information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the increase in digital connectivity, which have accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic, are transforming international trade. The expanded use of digital platforms, the rise of digitally ordered trade in goods and services (i.e. e-commerce) and of digitally deliverable services (i.e. services delivered remotely over ICT networks such as ICT, financial or educational e-services),<sup>8</sup> are making the exchange of goods, services and information easier and cheaper, and are enabling access to wider markets. This affects what is traded and how. There are both opportunities and challenges from these trends from the perspective of persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups. Distributional effects are likely to occur through all three channels: the employment channel, the consumption channel and the public provision channel.

Regarding the employment channel, the development of digital labour platforms is generating new jobs in a range of sectors for workers of different skills (e.g. from low-skilled data processing to high-skilled software development or data analytics, among others). In LMICs in particular, such platforms are regarded as a promising source of work opportunities, including for those who were previously outside the labour market such as women, persons with disabilities and youth (ILO 2021b). Businesses are also benefiting, as they can use digital platforms to sell their products to a wider market, expand labour recruitment to a global as well as local workforce, and improve productivity. Along with these opportunities, several challenges are also emerging for both workers and businesses. For platform workers, the challenges relate mostly to the irregularity of work and income, working conditions, and inadequate social protection coverage (ILO 2021b). As for businesses, traditional small enterprises in low-income countries face particular hardship because of aggressive competition from large e-commerce platform companies, poor digital infrastructure, and, more broadly, an uneven playing field. Because most digital platforms operate across multiple borders and jurisdictions, regulatory matters are complex to solve, and this regulatory uncertainty means that the most vulnerable workers and enterprises tend to be the least protected.

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8 The category of digitally deliverable services is wider than just ICT services. For more detail on various categories of e-services and implications of digital trade for least developed countries see UNCTAD, 2021, Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on trade in the digital economy, Technical Notes on ICT for Development No. 19. And UNCTAD, 2022 Digital trade: Opportunities and actions for developing countries Policy Brief N0.92, January 2022.

The expanded use of digital technologies has also distributional effects through the consumption and public provision channels. For example, digital technologies can contribute to the adoption and diffusion of smart AT products (e.g. fall detectors). Moreover, digital platforms can enable consumers to remotely purchase goods and services from a wider variety of markets. Digitalization can also change the costs and nature of public services provision, for example through innovations in transport infrastructure, or when governments opt to move their administrative services (including some aspects of social protection and/or health services delivery) online. The extent to which consumers and public services users will be able to benefit from these innovations will be highly contingent on their digital skills and broader literacy. It will also depend on their income level and their household circumstances, as well as the general level of infrastructural development of the area where they live.

The CRPD, and many statements of international organizations and governments, increasingly highlight the potential of ICTs and digital platforms to enable persons with disabilities' greater inclusion, by facilitating access to information, business transactions, use of e-commerce, and even greater availability of educational and health services (World Bank 2016, OECD and WTO 2022). Yet, evidence from LMICs shows a significant and persistent digital divide between persons with and without disabilities, for example in mobile and smartphone ownership as well as mobile internet use (GSMA, 2021). This divide is often amplified for women. Inadequate design of digital technologies, high prices as well as a lack of literacy and digital skills are factors contributing to the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the benefits of ICT. Safety and security risks such as on-line fraud or harm related to data privacy, are other barriers cited by workers and consumers with disabilities for not using internet.

In sum, digital technologies have the potential to support the expansion of international trade and make it more inclusive, including for workers and consumers with disabilities. However, existing shortcomings in ICT infrastructure, affordability of connection, poor digital skills and regulatory frameworks, mean that the digital divide remains wide, between countries as well as between urban and rural areas, between large firms and SMEs, between men and women, and between persons with and without disabilities.

AfT disbursements specific to ICT have increased considerably since 2018 (OECD and WTO 2022). It is paramount that programmes and initiatives in this area are specifically designed to close the digital divide and make digital infrastructure universally accessible. Selected examples are reviewed in section 4.3.

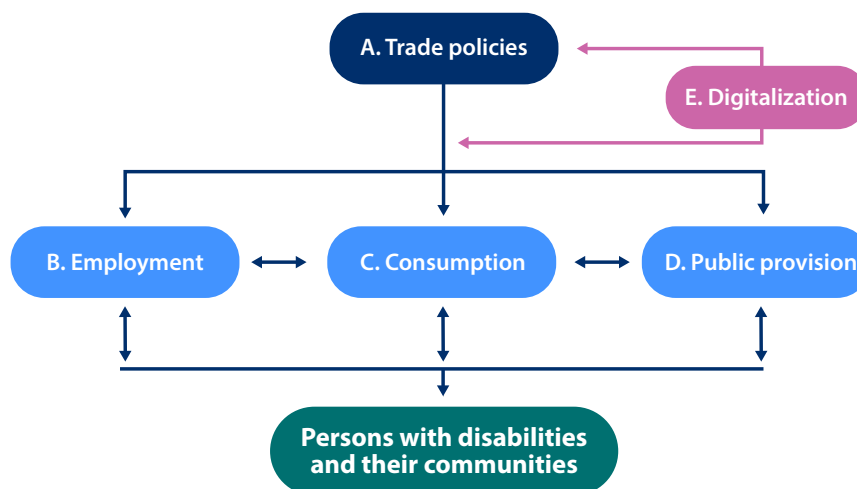


### 3.6 Summary scheme

The discussion in this chapter highlighted that the relationship between trade, persons with disabilities and their communities is multifaceted. As a way of concluding this chapter, Figure 1 illustrates the three main channels through which international trade can directly or indirectly affect persons with disabilities: employment, consumption, and public provision. The diagram also includes a fourth channel for digitalization, which is represented as an underlying process interacting with the other three channels of trade effects transmission.

All the channels interact with each other, highlighting the relevance of a holistic approach to disability inclusive trade policies, which is illustrated through double-sided arrows. For example, sectoral policies aimed at generating new jobs in high value-added segments of a GVC may not produce the desired outcome of improving employment prospects for persons with disabilities, unless these policies are accompanied by measures to improve access to necessary AT products. Widespread use of AT would enable a larger number of workers with disabilities to learn new skills and undertake more complex tasks at work, hence enhancing their opportunities for training and promotion. In order to widen opportunities, barriers in transport infrastructure also need to be reduced or removed.

**Figure 1.** Trade policies and persons with disabilities: transmission channels



Source: Authors' design

The specific policy processes related to each channel, or sphere, have been described in earlier sections and are summarized in Box 4. The list in Box 4 is not exhaustive and constitutes simply a starting point. The right mix of policy measures to achieve disability inclusive trade is likely to vary depending on a country's socio-economic context. In sum, trade policies need to pursue multiple entry-points and acknowledge the diversity of circumstances, needs and aspirations that characterizes the lives of persons with disabilities and their communities.

#### **Box 4: What makes trade policies inclusive of persons with disabilities?**

The following conditions need to be met to ensure that trade policies are inclusive of persons with disabilities and their communities.

##### **A. Trade policies**

A.1. The substantive participation of persons with disabilities and OPDs in trade policy decision-making contributes to shape a disability inclusive trade policy agenda.

A.2. Trade agreements adopt a human rights approach to disability.

##### **B. Employment**

B.1. Trade policies improve working conditions, pay, and accessibility of trade-related occupations where persons with disabilities are already employed.

B.2. Trade policies generate new and better employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in higher value-added segments of value chains.

##### **C. Consumption**

C.1. Trade policies improve availability and reduce prices of goods and services that are essential for human development (e.g. quality food and medicines).

C.2. Trade policies boost local capacity in the provision of AT products and services, and increase competitiveness of global AT markets by facilitating entry of firms from LMICs.

#### **D. Public Provision**

D.1. Resources allocated to essential health services and social protection are adequate and these services are made accessible.

D.2. Trade-related regulations related to the supply of public services protect equitable access for the most disadvantaged.

D.3. Universal accessibility standards for roads, transport and other infrastructure are enforced.

#### **E. Digitalization**

Trade policies go hand in hand with policy efforts to reduce barriers to digital inclusion. Measures aimed at improving accessibility and affordability of digital technologies, digital skills, internet safety and regulations are put in place.

## 4 Disability inclusive trade policy in practice: selected examples

The analytical framework in Chapter 3 illustrated the processes through which trade policies and regulations can either improve or undermine the rights of persons with disabilities, depending on design and implementation. This chapter presents examples of existing programmes and initiatives that highlight opportunities for improving the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of global trade. The evidence is organized around three main policy areas that have been identified as priorities in our stakeholder consultations: 1. promoting decent work for persons with disabilities in GVCs; 2. promoting the production, trade and use of assistive technologies; and 3. reducing the digital divide to enable disability inclusion in ICT-driven international trade. These areas are inter-related. The review intends to draw insights for policy action and does not claim to be exhaustive.

### 4.1 Promoting decent work in GVCs

The ILO has long been advocating for a comprehensive approach to promote decent work in general, and the inclusion of persons with disabilities in decent work in particular (ILO, 2015). This approach must simultaneously include: 1. enabling a supportive legislative and policy environment for disability inclusion; 2. increasing the employability of persons with disabilities, and 3. promoting the creation of decent jobs for workers with disabilities in private and public sectors.

The ILO further recommends the adoption of a twin-track strategy involving both the inclusion of disability concerns in general (or 'mainstream') policy programmes, and the promotion of programmes that specifically target workers with disabilities.

Earlier parts of this report described the complex nature of employment relationships that characterize GVCs and noted that GVCs can be a source of both ‘good’ jobs (i.e. decent jobs in the ILO meaning of the term)<sup>9</sup> and ‘bad’ jobs (i.e. jobs characterized by poor working conditions and unfair earnings). The GVC policy literature points to the crucial role that interlayered forms of private, social and public governance (i.e. the rules and policies that frame participant actions) play in influencing high-road trajectories and decent jobs creation along GVCs (Barrientos, 2019).

Reflecting the policy approaches and frameworks outlined above, the review of initiatives and programmes presented in this section is organized around the themes of a. GVC governance for disability inclusion, and b. company-specific interventions vs. systems approaches. The final sub-section summarizes key insights from available case studies and assessments of existing projects.

#### 4.1.1 GVC Governance for disability inclusion

In global value chains, governance involves three groups of policy actors: private governance is exercised by buyers (e.g. international brands), social governance is exercised by civil society organizations (e.g. NGOs and trade unions), and public governance is exercised by governments and multilateral organizations (Barrientos, 2019; Mayer and Posthuma, 2012). Box 4 elaborates on these three forms of governance.

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9 Decent work is employment that “respects the fundamental rights of the human person as well as the rights of workers in terms of conditions of work safety and remuneration” (Article 6, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). The Decent Work Agenda, includes four pillars: full and productive employment, rights at work, social protection and the promotion of social dialogue. Labour rights include basic rights such as no forced labour, no child labour, no discrimination, freedom of association and collective bargaining, as well as standards on terms of employment and job security. Decent Work and the 2020 Agenda for Sustainable Development wcms\_436923

### Box 5: Private, social and public governance in GVCs

**Private governance** refers to how retailers and brands directly coordinate and control different suppliers along their value chains. This includes contractual terms stipulating what products are to be produced, by whom, where, how, by when and to what specifications. In addition, retailers and brands expect their suppliers to meet a range of private standards such as: product quality (e.g. food safety requirements); social standards in respect of working conditions; and environmental standards.

**Social governance** is driven by civil society organisations (CSOs), such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and trade unions. At a global level, civil society activity includes challenging lead-firm approaches to labour standards in GVCs. At national and local levels, CSOs play a key role in mediating the employer-employee relationship, monitoring working conditions and seeking to raise standards above legislated minima.

**Public governance** is exercised by public actors and nation states play a central regulatory role. Public governance includes rules and regulations set by national or local government, such as labour laws that impact the conditions of workers. These normally set only minimum standards in GVCs. Other public governance measures, such as industrial policy and trade agreements, can affect decent work outcomes both indirectly and directly through social clauses.

Source: Alford et al. (2021)

The following paragraphs describe existing initiatives for improving access to decent work for persons with disabilities in GVCs. Some examples belong to the social governance space (e.g. Homenet), but the majority of the cases involves some form of interlayered governance. All the initiatives listed here are not specifically designed to support persons with disabilities. However, they provide a conducive environment for the inclusion of disabled workers' concerns in general struggles for the full realization of workers' rights.

The **Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI)** is a multi-stakeholder initiative bringing together private companies, trade unions and NGOs to ensure compliance with international labour standards in the global supply chains of member companies. It thus provides an example of the interlayering of private and social governance. ETI's code of labour practice is based on core ILO conventions, which members companies adopt. Alliances between companies

and social actors provide more credibility than companies alone pursuing social compliance.<sup>10</sup> The ETI has contributed to a range of general initiatives on labour standards in a variety of countries (see for example Barrientos, 2019 as well as the ETI website) and has also produced a Base Code Guidance on Disability (ETI, 2018) specifically. The Code Guidance on Disability is aimed at companies looking to ensure disability inclusion in their supply chains and prevent discrimination or exploitation by unscrupulous employers, in line with the 2017 UNGC/ILO Guide for Business on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ETI, 2018). Suggestions include:

- Companies should develop an inclusive sourcing policy and embed the policy throughout the organisation, in all business areas (procurement, IT, marketing, finance, legal) (UNGC/ILO, 2017).
- Companies should remove potential obstacles to businesses owned by persons with disabilities for joining their supply chain, and offer support to improve engagement and success (UNGC/ILO, 2017).
- Companies should include disability inclusion in due diligence with suppliers (ETI, 2018). For example, “if the country where the supplier is located, has a quota law, the company could require the supplier to meet this obligation” (UNGC/ILO, 2017: 28).
- Companies can draw on expertise available from organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), people with disabilities, and national and international business and disability networks to ensure that people with disabilities are offered decent working conditions (ETI, 2018).
- Companies should encourage their suppliers to source from businesses owned by people with disabilities (UNGC/ILO, 2017). However, care should be taken to ensure that they are using human rights-based business practices (ETI, 2018). When sourcing from suppliers that only employ people with disabilities, ‘segregated employment’ should be avoided as this form of employment “..may not necessarily offer rights, choice, trade union membership or decent work and wages to disabled workers” (ETI, 2018: 29).

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10 Social compliance guides how brands ensure ethical working practices both in their own companies and down their supply chains.

- Companies can encourage greater commitment to disability inclusion from suppliers through constructive incentives (Ludke, 2022: 37) such as:
- Committing to a long-term purchasing agreement with suppliers who provide decent work to people with disabilities.
- Providing suppliers who commit to offering decent jobs to people with disabilities with more space on the shelves or a more prominent position on the website, so they can reach more consumers.

**Fair trade** is a civil society initiative that mainly supports smallholders and their communities, as well as wage labourers on plantations. Its main goal is to facilitate the involvement of small-scale producers in global markets “based on dialogue, transparency and respect, .... and seeking greater equity in international trade” ([www.bafts.org.uk/fair-trade](http://www.bafts.org.uk/fair-trade)). The expansion of the fair trade movement was significantly boosted by access to the value chains of mainstream supermarkets, including some supermarket own labels carrying Fairtrade certification, initiated in the UK in 2003 (Barrientos and Smith, 2007). Two recent projects supported by Fairtrade Finland in collaboration with the Ethiopian Centre for Disability and Development (ECDD) focus on specifically promoting greater inclusion of persons with disabilities in coffee production and in the flower sector, respectively, and are described in Box 5.

### **Box 6. Fairtrade Finland: Disability Inclusive Fair Trade in coffee and flowers**

Fairtrade is a non-profit global movement for trade justice, focusing on the empowerment of small-scale farmers and agricultural workers in low-income countries through fair and sustainable trade. Fairtrade certified producers meet certain social, economic and environmental requirements that promote continuous improvements from certified organizations. Minimum safety net prices are guaranteed when market prices fall. Additionally, producers are paid a premium on top of the selling price that they can invest in projects of their choice. They decide together how to spend the Fairtrade premium to reach goals such as improving farming practices, businesses, or health and education quality in their communities.



As a part of a four-year development programme from 2018 to 2021, Fairtrade Finland implemented two projects aimed at empowering persons with disabilities in Ethiopia. These projects have achieved promising results, demonstrating that engaging persons with disabilities in GVCs ethically and sustainably can not only provide them with better income and employment opportunities, but also improve their agency and reduce social stigma.

One project focused on coffee production. Fairtrade Finland partnered with the Ethiopian Centre for Disability and Development (ECDD) to review regulations regarding disability inclusion, gender equality, child labour and finance, as well as human resource management practices. As a result, the three small farmer cooperatives involved in the project were able to adopt gender and disability inclusion policies. Awareness raising and capacity building sessions on disability inclusion were provided. Women and persons with disabilities particularly benefitted from leadership and managerial training. Following these developments, the percentage of leadership positions held by women and persons with disabilities increased to 56 % of the total. In general, people from disadvantaged background appear to have gained greater voice in their cooperatives.

Another project aimed to improve terms and conditions of employment in flower farms, where the majority of workers are women. In addition to promoting workers' rights in general, the project focused on addressing specific challenges faced by workers with disabilities. This included providing specialized training and assistive devices, such as environmentally friendly wheelchairs tailored to users' needs, thus enabling persons with disabilities to work with greater autonomy. Assistive devices have proven essential for the workers in their day-to-day activities. Gebeyehu Begna, a teacher at Sher Flowers Ethiopia, is one of the women who benefitted from an electric wheelchair, specifically adapted to her conditions. She says the wheelchair allows her to travel to work more easily, and provides a safe way to carry her children.

Source: Fairtrade Finland, 2021; Fairtrade Finland, 2022.

Another example in the social governance space is provided by **Homenet**, a network of home-based worker organizations across South Asia and South-East Asia. Homenet organizations have long focused on supporting informal home-based industrial workers and demanding that global retail companies better protect the rights of the homeworkers

in their supply chains (see for example the Hidden Homeworkers Project <https://www.homeworkersww.org.uk/about-hidden-homeworkers>). In a joint call to action in response to the COVID-19 crisis, for example, Homenet, together with other WIEGO (Women in the Informal Economy Globalizing and Organizing) member organizations, demanded that “Home-based workers in global supply chains be treated as other wage earners (C 177), which includes contributions from brands and employers” and that “..Brands.. contribute to a common pool of funds to support homeworkers and other informal economy workers in their value chains” (WIEGO, July 2021). Most Homenet initiatives do not appear to have programmes that specifically support persons with disabilities. However, they are aimed at a category of workers in which persons with disabilities tend to be over-represented, and therefore have good potential to contribute to the objective of disability inclusion in decent work in GVCs (stakeholder interviews).

Finally, the **ILO/IFC Better Work programme** ([betterwork.org](http://betterwork.org)) provides a good example of interlayered governance involving collaboration between private, public as well as social actors in the global garment supply chain. Better Work (BW) is jointly managed by the ILO and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and works in various LMICs to support both workers and businesses. It works closely with employers and trade unions at factory and national levels as well as governments in country programmes. At the factory level, BW combines assessments for compliance with national labour laws and core international labour standards, together with factory level technical support and capacity building. One of BW’s innovative features is the institution of workers-management committees, involving the active engagement of both workers and managers who collaborate in non-hierarchical ways on problem-solving and decision-making related to factory matters. BW also works with national governments, supporting requests for assistance in strengthening labour inspectorates, reducing workplace accident rates, reforming laws and strengthening industrial relations and social protection systems that can have a spill-over effect beyond the garment sector.

As part of this work, disability issues have been raised in several countries. For example, Better Work Indonesia has piloted programmes to train and place persons with disabilities in factories and provided advice to employers on how to employ people with disabilities (Better Work Indonesia 2017).

More recently, Better Work Jordan, with financial support from Canada, has started a new initiative specifically aimed at “Increased inclusivity of workplaces for workers with disabilities and those with intersecting forms of discrimination”. Canada’s financial and technical assistance in this area is provided in the context of the Canada-Jordan Free Trade agreement in force since 2012, which also includes a Canada-Jordan Agreement on Labour Cooperation (stakeholder interview).

Concerns about better terms of inclusion of workers with disabilities in garment GVCs are becoming more prominent in the current BW strategy, and further initiatives are planned in Cambodia and Ethiopia (stakeholder interviews).

#### 4.1.2 Targeted Programmes: Individual company vs. Systems Approaches

Programmes that specifically target persons with disabilities and focus on the inclusion of workers with disabilities in GVCs seem to fall under two broad categories. One category includes initiatives of private companies that are committed to promote disability inclusion both in their own organization and along their supply chains. These initiatives often originate as ethical businesses initiatives (see ETI in section 4.1.1), they are led by an individual company but may also involve OPDs and, at times, support from donors. SERA Helsinki is an example in this category and is described further below.

Another category includes a holistic ‘eco-systems’ approach, which has emerged in recent years and has been adopted in a number of programmes committed to reduce barriers to employment for persons with disabilities in LMICs (Meaney-Davis & Coe, 2020). The idea informing this approach is that, to be effective, employment programmes need to address multiple barriers through a range of interventions, and through engagement and coordination with multiple stakeholders (Saleh and Bruyère, 2018; Khayat-zadeh-Mahani et al., 2019; Wickenden et al., 2020; SPARK, 2022). This approach, therefore, somewhat mirrors the ILO approach of combining together the objectives of ‘increasing employability’, ‘making employers more inclusive’ and ‘enabling environments’.

Such programmes work closely with governments to strengthen policy implementation and build disability inclusion capacity across the whole employment system. The programmes also strive to work together with a multiplicity of employers, service providers, and persons with disabilities. The four-year programme “Inclusion Works” funded by UK Aid (Inclusion Works, 2021) and the Sparking Disability Inclusive Rural Transformation Project (SPARK, 2022), involving a partnership between International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the ILO and Light for the World, an international disability and development NGO, are examples of this approach. Further details on selected initiatives under the Inclusion Works programme are provided in the last paragraphs of this section.

**SERA Helsinki** is an ethical Finnish company that sells organic woollen carpets and towels produced by people with disabilities living in Ethiopia (Abilis Foundation, 2018). SERA’s mission is to improve inclusion of people with disabilities at all levels of their business (SERA, 2023). SERA started its collaboration with the Abilis Foundation in 2017 under the support of Finnpartnership, a business partnership programme financed by the Ministry

for Foreign Affairs of Finland (Finnpartnership, 2020). The main aim of the collaboration was to improve the situation of persons with disabilities and their organizations by creating job opportunities for them in the carpet value chain. The idea was to engage persons with disabilities in different nodes of the value chain: from raw material production (sheep rearing and wool production) to material production (thread-making) and final product (carpet) production (Abilis Foundation, 2018). It took time to build trust between all actors involved, partly due to carpet makers' fear of being exploited, but the collaboration eventually led to many positive outcomes (Finnpartnership, 2020).

Most OPDs involved in the project have their own workshops and some of them are organised in cooperatives. Abilis provided financial support to OPDs to renovate their workspaces, improve accessibility (e.g ramps, accessible toilets, and, in some cases, transport between home and the workshop), and procure production tools and materials. Abilis covered also the pay of carpet weavers and instructors for about two years (Finnpartnership, 2020). Abilis and the OPDs identified and trained persons with disabilities for various tasks, while SERA was responsible for design, quality assurance, sales and marketing (Finnpartnership, 2020).

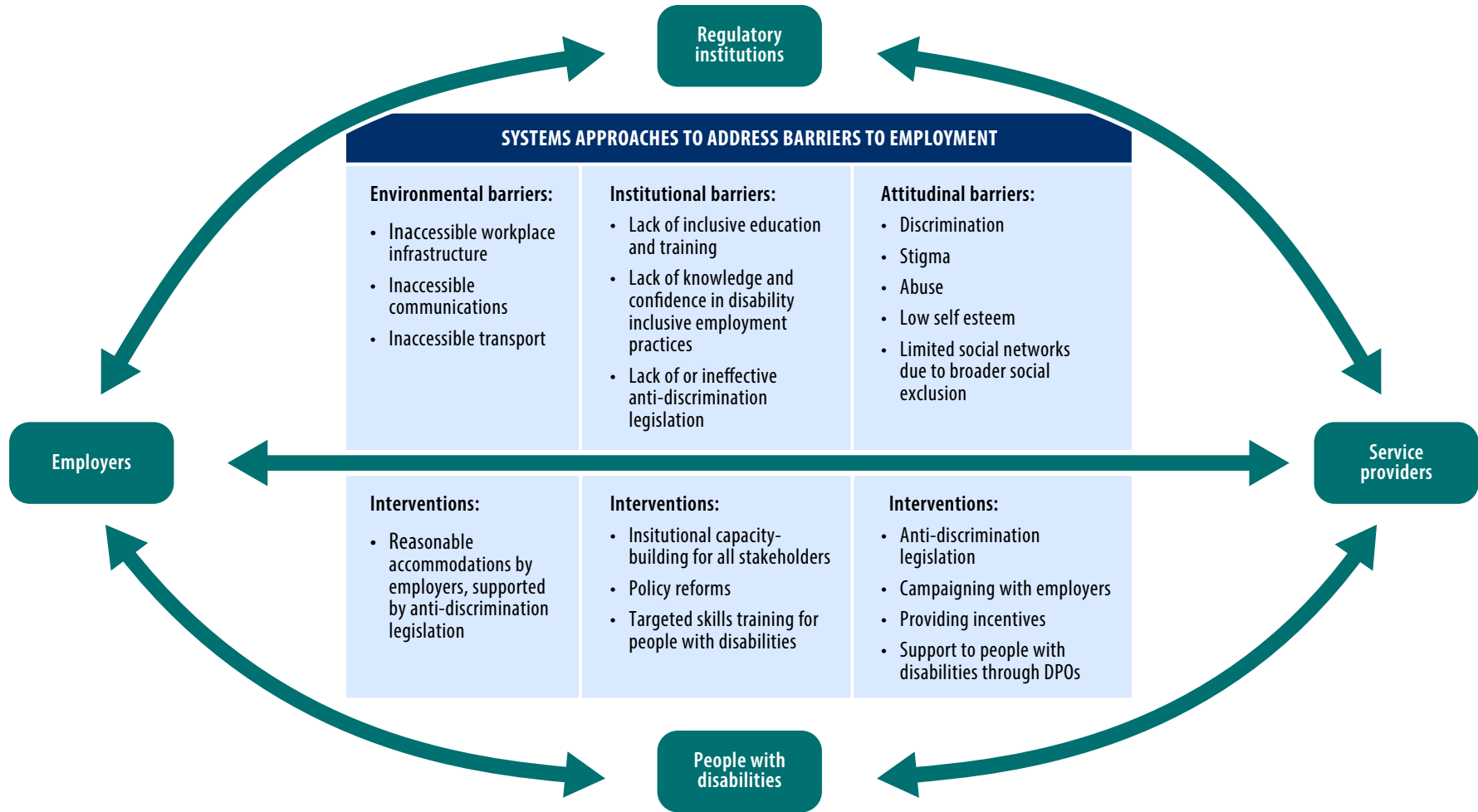
Project participants include persons with different types of disability, with a higher prevalence of visual impairments and physical impairments. So far, participants have mostly been working-age women. Mothers of children with disabilities are also included. Participants' skill levels vary: many had limited experience at the time of joining, while some individuals/groups have had long experience in similar production work for local markets.

The collaboration between Abilis and SERA has been successful in providing persons with disabilities with the opportunity to find stable employment and access markets otherwise out of their reach (stakeholder interview). The training provided has been long and intensive enough to allow persons with disabilities to gain the necessary skills, and the business partner has demonstrated a genuine interest in working with persons with disabilities (ibidem).

There have also been challenges, largely related to uncertainties regarding raw material production, transport, and water shortage. Investments in general infrastructure (e.g. stable electricity and water supply); training in business skills; and measures to reduce carpet weavers' dependence on one single buyer have been identified as priorities for the sustainability of the project (stakeholder interview).

Under **Systems Approaches**, programmes coordinate with a variety of stakeholders in the labour market at the country level, to address multiple barriers faced by persons with disabilities in a systematic way. Figure 2 illustrates the multiple barriers and institutional levels that these programmes seek to cover.

**Figure 2.** Systems Approaches for decent employment: barriers, interventions and stakeholders



Source: Meaney-Davis & Coe, 2020

An important initial step in these programmes involves undertaking preparatory mapping exercises, usually adopting innovative participatory methods and social network analysis. Under the **Inclusion Works** (IW) programme, for example, comprehensive labour market assessments were initially carried out in each of the countries where IW operated. These labour market assessments are carried out for each sector of the economy and are used to identify opportunities and bottlenecks in both the supply and demand sides of the labour market. They are regularly updated (Inclusion Works, 2021; Inclusive Futures, 2022). Other exercises may involve zooming in a single sector or value chain (e.g. coffee or cocoa production) and always involve extensive stakeholders consultations. Persons with disabilities occupy the centre of a map, which is then used to describe the ways in which workers or farmers with disabilities relate to different nodes of the core value chain as well as support services in the extended value chain (SPARK, 2022).

Implementation strategies tend to vary, depending on country contexts and other factors. Many of the initiatives under this approach are ongoing, making it difficult to provide a conclusive assessment. Even though the IW programme had not been originally designed to promote decent work for persons with disabilities in export-oriented production specifically, its Kenya sorghum farmers project has now developed into a more ambitious project linking sorghum farmers from the whole of Eastern Africa with the supply chains of two global drinks brands – Diageo’s East African Breweries Limited (EABL) and Coca-Cola Beverages Africa (Kenya) (stakeholder interview).

The objective of the new five-year programme, under the USAID-funded Global Labor Program – Inclusive Futures (Brown, 2022; Inclusive Futures, 2022) is ‘to embed inclusion and improved labour rights in the companies’ supply and distribution chains’. Diageo EABL’s target is to ensure that by 2026 farmers with disabilities will constitute at least 3 per cent of all farmers in the EABL supply chain. Coca Cola Beverages Africa (CCBA)’s main objective is to include and support female retailers with disabilities in their Kenya retailer network. Consortium partners involved in this programme include civil society organizations and OPDs such as the Central Organization of Trade Unions Kenya, Equal Rights Trust, Innovations for Poverty Action, Kenya Female Advisory Organization (KEFEADO), Sightsavers, Ulula, and United Disabled Persons of Kenya (Inclusive Futures, 2022b).

Another promising initiative that flourished under IW regards a collaboration with the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance and its Youth Employment Programme in Kenya and Nigeria (SHA, 2023d). The Sustainable Hospitality Alliance includes 21 world- leading hotel companies and 35 supply chains (SHA, 2023a). They partner with non-profits, philanthropic organisations, governments and the private sector on shared sustainability challenges, including addressing human rights risks in supply chains and providing opportunities for disadvantaged youth in the hospitality sector. The project in both Kenya

and Nigeria involved developing an accessible curriculum including skills relevant to hospitality, a solid base in the English language, computer and basic accountancy skills, as well as help with job applications. Local implementing partners delivered soft skills training, while local hotels provided 2–4 months of practical training, for example in housekeeping as well as kitchen, food and beverages departments. Trainees were then supported to find employment in hospitality or related workplaces (SHA, 2023c).

### 4.1.3 Insights from case studies of existing projects

Evidence on programmes that seek to promote decent work for persons with disabilities in export-oriented production in LMICs is limited. Publicly available reports on specific initiatives do not often include their full details, and comprehensive project evaluations are rare, thus offering only a partial picture of what exists on the ground, in terms of sectors covered and other project characteristics. Based on the limited evidence available, a few patterns and trends can be discerned.

The majority of projects documented in the literature is in either agriculture (e.g. Arandan-Jan, 2021; SPARK, 2022 in Burkina Faso, Malawi, Mozambique and India; TransformTrade in Tanzania (Ledeco Advocates, 2018)) or textiles/apparel (e.g. Abilis/SERA as well as ILO in Ethiopia; Marks and Start International programme by Marks&Spencer in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka (M&S, 2014, 2022)) Projects largely focus on improving the situation of smallholders and/or micro-entrepreneurs. While this focus is understandable, since these are the sectors and occupations where workers with disabilities tend to cluster in most LMICs, policy efforts should aim to **broaden decent work opportunities for persons with disabilities in other export-oriented sectors and in higher-skill occupations. For example, specific interventions aimed at workers with disabilities should be mainstreamed in sectors that are becoming prominent in the AfT agenda, such as sustainable tourism and ICT.**

Some of the existing projects recognize **the importance of holistic or integrated approaches**. Hence, they are not limited to a single barrier (e.g. a lack of relevant skills) but seek to address multiple barriers by working with different stakeholder groups (sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2). Interventions strive to combine, for example, improved access to training in relevant skills together with provision of inputs, appropriate tools and assistive technologies, as well as links to higher value markets. **They tend to remain at a small scale, however, and often continue to face challenges related to macro-level barriers**, such as poor electricity and water infrastructure or weakly enforced national legislation (stakeholder interviews).

**The role of OPDs is crucial in mediating relationships between various stakeholders and informing the design of projects, but is often weak.** It is important to include people with disabilities and their representative groups at the forefront of efforts to promote disability inclusion in GVCs. However, OPDs often lack capacity and resources. More development assistance is needed to fund and equip OPDs and people with disabilities with leadership, managerial and entrepreneurship skills, as well as support them to organise into cooperatives, when relevant.

There is little disaggregated data on the types of functional difficulties (e.g. seeing, walking, concentrating) that people with disabilities who participate in value chains projects have. Programmes which record these data have found that workers with physical difficulties tend to be the majority. More data collection and disaggregation is needed to identify who is missing out, and more efforts are needed to ensure that job opportunities in GVCs are available for people with a diverse range of disabilities.

**Women with disabilities face gender-intensified barriers**, which mean they often have lower skills than men as well as more limited access to productive resources and technologies. Also, they tend to be poorly represented in OPDs and trade unions. Carrying out comprehensive gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) assessments at the planning stage of a programme can help to identify the measures required to overcome these gender-intensified barriers.

**Projects that successfully bring together people with and without disabilities** in enterprise groups or farming (e.g. Transform Trade, 2023; Simon Brown, 2022) not only make business practices more inclusive. They can also contribute to improve general attitudes towards workers with disabilities.

Employment strategies specifically aimed at promoting inclusion of persons with disabilities into GVCs can learn from broader disability inclusive employment programmes in LMICs, especially those that seek to address systemic barriers, of which there is a small but growing number (e.g. Inclusion Works).



## 4.2 Making assistive technology available and affordable

Globally, one in three people, or more than 2.5 billion, need at least one AT product. With global population aging and the rising prevalence of noncommunicable diseases, 3.5 billion people are expected to need at least one AT product in 2050 and AT markets are expected to expand (WHO-UNICEF 2022). Users can be of any age and are very diverse in the type of functional difficulties (e.g. seeing, hearing) and activity limitations (e.g. selfcare) they may need AT for, as well as in their environments and resources.

**AT is an enabler.** In the CRPD, AT is mentioned as a human right enabler (e.g. articles 20, 26). In the context of international trade, the use AT can, for example, enable persons with disabilities to take better advantage of employment opportunities.

### 4.2.1 AT Markets

AT production is very complex in that each disability type has its own set of technologies and requires different types of expertise. As a result, AT has many distinct and fragmented markets with different structures. Market analyses for wheelchairs, hearing aids, eyeglasses, prostheses, and digital AT show affordability issues for all the five products. High prices are due to limited market competition and limited supply, to the additional costs required for tailored-made products, as well as high shipping costs and taxes (Savage et al 2021).

On the supply side, in LMICs there is a lack of productive capacity and capital. For instance, for prosthetics, Savage et al (2021) note that a lack of capital to procure quality components at service delivery points limits the availability of components. Very few local distributors supply prosthetic components, so prosthetists often place individual orders directly with international manufacturers. This results in inconsistent availability and delays in fitting to end-users. For some AT products (e.g. wheelchairs), NGOs with limited resources are the only suppliers. In many LMICs, there is not only limited supply of AT products, but also limited demand, due largely to low purchasing power as well as a lack of information among potential users and their caregivers. This results in many needs remaining unmet.

In addition, AT products need to meet users' needs in their environments. Yet, most assistive products available in LMIC markets do not meet quality standards. Still on prosthetics, Savage et al (2021) note that purchasers often procure the least expensive option, which may be sub-standard or inappropriate for the end user. For example, standards may only focus on durability and not on performance of components once fitted on a user.

An exploratory quantitative study on international trade flows and tariffs (Delgado Ramos and Rizzo Battistella 2019) shows the international AT market is a concentrated market for both supplying and importing countries, and that the share of LMICs in AT markets is very small. A study of six countries in East Africa (GDI Hub, 2018) shows that there is some local production of AT, mostly for mobility devices such as wheelchairs, walking aids and prostheses. Even in countries where there is a local supply chain for mobility aids, reliance on imported components remain high. Hearing aids, glasses and even white canes are often imported.

In general, trade reforms related to AT products may help reduce supply chain bottlenecks. For example, trade infrastructure reforms (e.g. credit, shipping systems) and removing or lowering tariffs for imported AT products may lead to greater availability and lower prices for consumers, hence contributing to reduce unmet needs among LMICs users. Consideration should also be given to how trade policy reforms may affect domestic production, which should not be stifled. As has been noted in the literature (WHO-UNICEF 2022), AT supply chains should not remain dependent on imports. This would avoid shortages during crises such as pandemics, among others.

## 4.2.2 Partnerships

Recent partnerships have worked towards improving access to quality and affordable AT products. The Global Cooperation on Assistive Health Technology (GATE) is a partnership among UN Agencies, donor agencies, professional organizations, academia and organizations of persons with disabilities<sup>11</sup>. It aims to improve access to high quality affordable AT products by supporting countries that develop national policies and providing guidance on service provision. It is a very large international community of AT users, producers, policy makers, advocates, educators and researchers. It facilitates knowledge exchange, networks and actions in relation to AT.

More recently, ATscale, the Global Partnership for Assistive Technology addresses prioritization, coordination, and investment in AT, as well as market challenges in key product areas at global and country levels. It aims to coordinate and mobilize stakeholders to strengthen AT eco-systems to increase the availability of and access to AT. The goal of ATscale is to ensure that 500 million more people globally are reached with life-changing AT by 2030<sup>12</sup>.

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11 More information is available at [this link](#).

12 More information on the ATscale partnership is available at: [atscalepartnership.org](https://atscalepartnership.org)

ATscale aims to facilitate trade by sharing information on buyers and sellers and thus provide information as a global public good. ATscale will soon do a study collecting information on regulations, tariffs, indirect taxes and health insurance coverage for AT. ATscale also funds country programs to improve the delivery of AT and to boost the demand for products.

### 4.3 Reducing the digital divide and making ICT universally accessible

As noted in Chapter 3, digital trade accounts for a growing share of international trade but its size varies greatly across regions. UNCTAD (2021) reports, for example, that in 2019 digitally deliverable services accounted for a significantly lower share of exports in least developed countries than in high-income countries. In addition, while over half the population in high-income countries shopped online, this figure was only 2 per cent in low-income countries. There is a general concern that, as digital ordering and digital delivery become increasingly critical to access markets in many parts of the world, those lacking the resources to access digital technologies risk falling further behind and remaining excluded from the benefits of trade. People with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to this kind of exclusion.

Barriers to digital inclusion are often exacerbated for people with disabilities.. Many people with disabilities lack **access** to mobile networks and enablers like electricity, agents, and formal IDs. In addition, devices, content, and services may not be easily accessible or easy to use. **Affordability** of mobile devices, data plans and electricity to charge devices is a frequent barrier due to low-income levels and additional costs associated with disability (e.g. need to purchase screen reader software or similar required adjustments). **Lack of literacy and digital skills, and limited awareness** of the benefits of digital technologies (i.e. accessibility features) are factors hindering the utilization of digital technologies by persons with disabilities. Persons with disabilities face greater **security risks** when it comes to mobile device theft, fraud, or harm related to data security, privacy, or internet use. It may be more difficult for them to recognize phishing scams and protect personal information on their screens. A majority of persons with disabilities don't consider digital technologies relevant to them. This is not only due to a lack of awareness but also to poor design and a **lack of relevant content**, since mobile products and services are not always tailored to their needs (GSMA, 2022)

Recognizing that many LMICs need support to improve capacities to engage in, and benefit from, digital trade, UNCTAD and other influential organizations such as the World Bank, emphasize that **a holistic approach is required to achieve more inclusive digital**

**outcomes.** UNCTAD (2022), for example, identifies different levels of coordinated policy actions in the areas of: ICT connectivity; education, skills and awareness; trade facilitation; microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises; gender-based inclusion; and regulatory frameworks. These policy actions are further spelt out in Box 7.

## **Box 7. UNCTAD's Recommended Policy Actions on Inclusive Digitalization**

### **1. ICT Connectivity**

Adequate, affordable, and reliable connectivity is essential to participate in the digital trade. Many AFT partner countries need to build and maintain high-speed, reliable, and affordable networks that cover a wide population, and ensure that affordable devices are available.

Key policy actions include:

- increasing public investment in infrastructure,
- strengthening regulatory framework for telecoms sector to crowd in foreign and domestic investment in infrastructure,
- facilitating imports of ICT related equipment and services.

### **2. Education, skills and awareness**

Digitalization has changed skill requirements of labour markets, requiring formal education systems to adapt and public and private skills development strategies to be implemented.

Key policy actions include:

- Integrating ICT at all levels of education,
- creating more opportunities for workers and teachers to keep up with digital skills,
- conducting awareness raising campaigns for individuals, business decision makers and policymakers.

### **3. Trade facilitation**

Countries need to adapt to increased levels of digital delivery and the shift from large shipments to large numbers of small parcels triggered by cross-border e-commerce.

Key policy actions include:

- Implementing the Agreement on Trade Facilitation under the WTO.
- Implementing digital single window systems
- Introducing simplified export processes for shipments

### **4. Microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises**

As global value chains become more dependent on digital solutions, countries must boost ICT use among smaller firms.

Key policy actions include:

- providing affordable access to ICT infrastructure
- development of ICT skills and knowledge in the business sector through training and capacity building directing trade promotion to support online platforms and businesses who need to adapt to digital standards

### **5. Gender-based inclusion**

Digital gender divide is most pronounced in LMICs. Key policy actions include:

- supporting women initiatives and role models in e-commerce
- developing disaggregated statistics

## 6. Regulatory frameworks

Countries need to establish policy, legislation, and regulatory frameworks that provide enabling environments to support digital trade.

Key policy actions include:

- promoting the digital economy for development and encouraging digital entrepreneurship,
- assuring high standards for privacy and data protection and,
- strong measures against cybercrime, strong protection of consumer rights and enforcing effective mechanisms and laws to resolve digital trade disputes.

Source: UNCTAD (2022)

**An important question is whether disability inclusion is adequately mainstreamed under each of this six areas of policy action.** We searched the literature and found only limited evidence so far. The rest of this section describes selected programmes that specifically address disability inclusion under the policy areas of ICT connectivity, education, skills and awareness and regulatory frameworks, respectively. Our review does not aim to be comprehensive but simply to illustrate a few examples that could be useful for the planning of a disability inclusive Aid for Trade Agenda.

### 4.3.1 ICT connectivity

To ensure adequate, affordable and reliable connectivity for people and enterprises to be able to engage in digital trade, LMICs need to build and maintain high-speed, reliable and affordable networks, with wide population coverage, as well as ensure the availability of affordable devices. Actions recommended by UNCTAD include:

- Ensuring an open, transparent and fair telecommunications market that attracts domestic and foreign investment in infrastructure, for example, through infrastructure-sharing, effective spectrum management and reduced taxes on ICT equipment and services
- Facilitating imports of relevant equipment and services through expedited regulatory authorization and trade facilitation processes, as well as reduced import duties on ICT equipment
- Increasing public investment in infrastructure

The following are examples of projects with potential to specifically address disability inclusion under these broad policy recommendations:

**KODE (Kosovo Digital Economy Project)**, launched by the World Bank, aims to improve the uneven distribution of digital infrastructure coverage between urban and rural areas in Kosovo. The project aims to develop rural infrastructure to connect underserved settlements and public institutions with high-speed broadband internet. The projects also offers technical assistance and capacity building to regulatory agencies in the telecoms sector. A number of factors make this project noteworthy. In addition to expanding high-speed broadband coverage to remote areas in general, the emphasis of the project is on providing additional funds to develop the digital skills of young women, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities. The objective is to maximize impact on local livelihoods and create more jobs opportunities closer to home for vulnerable youth. The project also envisages to reduce barriers for youth with disabilities by supporting e-service centres and digital ambassadors in rural areas. Another component of the project addresses export effectiveness of local ICT businesses by providing specific information and insights on the international market and contract opportunities. In sum this project adopts a holistic approach to digital inclusion (Solutions for Youth Employment, 2021; World Bank, 2017).

**The Connect Africa Initiative** (OECD/WTO 2017 monitoring exercise, case story 16) was launched in 2007 by several international partners, including the World Bank and the African Development Bank, with the goal of bridging the connectivity gap in Africa. The initiative has focused on mobilizing funding for broadband fiber connections that can connect Africa to the rest of the world at a cheaper and faster rate than satellite connections. Additionally, support has been provided to build backbone infrastructure to facilitate the transfer of high-speed data within African countries and make it more commercially viable to provide communication services beyond main urban centres. Providing policy and regulatory support is another main pillar of this initiative. The aim is to foster an enabling environment by working with governments and other stakeholders to develop policies and regulations that support innovation, investment, and competition in the ICT sector. Measures include among others reducing license fees, simplify licensing procedures and promoting transparent and non-discriminatory access to networks. Even if not specifically designed for disability inclusion, Connect Africa Initiative focus on making ICT infrastructure more accessible and hence can indirectly benefit persons with disabilities by helping to overcome some of the barriers they typically face in accessing digital trade.

A useful approach to financing ICT in LMICs could involve the use of **Universal Service Funds (USFs)**. USFs are mechanisms funded through a small (i.e. one or two per cent) surtax on telecommunications services with the aim to create a source of revenue that can be drawn upon to finance socially beneficial ICT projects. . Rwanda, for example, used

its USFs to provide secondary schools in remote rural areas with internet connectivity. In Thailand, USFs finance the creation of services for persons with disabilities, older adults and underprivileged people and offer discounted telecommunication fees for persons with disabilities (ITU, 2013). While USFs exist in many AfT partner countries, so far they do not seem to have been effectively used. Challenges include a lack of clear governance structures, limited technical capacity, and difficulties in ensuring transparency and accountability (GSMA 2022). AfT could be used to provide technical assistance and capacity building in policy, regulation, and implementation to address these challenges and promote effective use of USFs for disability inclusion.

### 4.3.2 Education, skills and awareness

Adapting to changes in labour markets and skills requirements induced by digitalization requires changes in formal education systems, as well as public and private skills development strategies. Actions recommended by UNCTAD include:

- Integrating ICT at all levels of education, embracing industrial collaboration in developing curricula and reforming teaching methods to promote complementary non-cognitive skills such as leadership and social and behavioural skills,
- Expanding opportunities for workers and teachers to retrain and upgrade skills, through the provision of digital literacy programmes, role models and networks, as well as incentives for workers and firms,
- Conducting awareness campaigns to ensure that individuals, business decision makers and policymakers understand the opportunities and challenges of digital trade.

Projects with potential to specifically address disability inclusion under these broad policy recommendations include:

**The Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas (POETA)** programme trains persons with disabilities on ICT and job readiness. It has over 100 informatics centres in 20 countries, mostly in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and cooperates with Education Ministries to offer computer-related training courses in educational spaces that are equipped with accessible technology (ECLAC 2018). In LAC, companies often struggle to find skilled workers for cyber security and tech-enabled positions while at the same time unemployment rates amongst persons with disabilities are high. POETA addresses this mismatch by upskilling persons



with disabilities and raising awareness among employers. POETA trains participants in programming, app development, and entry-level data science. It also teaches skills that can help with job applications (e.g. writing resumes) as well as personal development (such as goal-setting and financial literacy) (World Bank, 2022). POETA works closely with private companies to help breaking down barriers that people with disabilities face when looking for work. Part of this effort includes understanding the specific skills that employers require and then adapting training curriculum accordingly. POETA aims also to make employers in the technology sector understand “that everyone has abilities”(Microsoft, n.d.).

**InAble and Microsoft** are collaborating in Kenya to teach blind pupils aged 8–13 computer and software programming skills over a three-year period. This initiative aims to address the fact that most software developers and programmers fail to consider the needs of the visually impaired, which, in turn, makes it difficult for them to access technology. The project aims to equip students with computer skills, help them to understand the coding languages behind the software they use, and prepare them for the job market. Introducing ICT skill training earlier in the education system for children with disabilities can help expand their opportunities later in life.

**Digital Data Divide (DDD)** is a global social enterprise that connects marginalized youth to jobs in the digital economy. DDD recruits and trains youth to work as data management operators who deliver Business Process Outsourcing services. DDD partners with local secondary schools and NGOs to recruit young people from disadvantaged areas and these also include 10 percent of youth with disabilities. Participants benefit from business education, social-emotional development, and technical skills training. Recruits are then either employed in DDD to perform digital work for local and international clients, or offered external placement in other ICT companies. (Solutions for Youth Employment, 2021; Digital Data Divide, n.d.).

**Kerjabilitas** (Eria, 2019; Kerjabilitas, n.d.) and **Virtualahan** (Solutions for Youth Employment, 2021) are two online platforms connecting persons with disabilities to employment opportunities in the ICT sector in Indonesia and the Philippines, respectively. Both platforms offer tailored training and support, and match job seekers with disability-inclusive employers, helping to promote a more diverse and inclusive workforce in the digital technology industry. Both platforms equip job seekers with the necessary technical skills and support to succeed in digital trade and jobs in the ICT sector. In addition, both initiatives offer peer support and soft skills training. Virtualahan’s coaching and mentorship programmes help develop soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, enabling individuals to effectively navigate the digital marketplace.

Similarly, Kerjabilitas offers job seekers soft skills training, including leadership development, time management, and interpersonal communication, which are critical in facilitating successful digital trade transactions.

### 4.3.3 Regulatory frameworks

Another element in UNCTAD's list of recommended policy actions for greater digital inclusion concerns the development of robust regulatory frameworks. These are important for protecting both buyers and sellers against cybercrime. Regulatory frameworks are also important for assuring high standards for privacy and data protection; and for strengthening mechanisms to resolve digital trade disputes among others. Only few initiatives in this policy area appear to specifically address the rights of persons with disabilities and are mentioned here.

**Safe Surfing** is an initiative funded by the European Union to train people with intellectual disabilities on data protection and safe online behavior. The project provides training through interactive sessions. It also provides training videos on several areas of data protection, in five different European languages to make the training more inclusive and accessible. The Safe Surfing project does not operate in LMICs, but it is a good model for the future, as persons with intellectual impairments are particularly vulnerable to identity fraud, cybercrime, cyber bullying and general abuse. Supporting people with intellectual disabilities in using the internet safely could have a significant impact for their inclusion in the digital world (Inclusion Europe, n.d.-a;-b).

**ICT regulatory policies in Kenya** constitute another interesting example. In recent years, Kenya has taken significant steps in making ICT policy more inclusive for persons with disabilities. For example, Kenya's 2019 National ICT Policy officially commits the government to provide an ICT environment that is fully accessible to persons with disabilities. With this policy, Kenya is the first country in Africa to develop ICT accessibility standards. A **National ICT Accessibility Standard** setting forth a number of requirements to ensure that persons with disabilities have equal access to ICT has been officially launched in May 2022 (Kenya News, 2022). One such requirement is that all ICT services and emergency communications must be made available to the public in alternative, accessible formats. Additionally, the Accessibility Standard mandates that both public and private entities must provide information and services in formats that are accessible and usable to everyone, including all disability types. This means that content producers must create content in an accessible format, while government websites must comply with international web accessibility standards. The National ICT Accessibility Standard has also implications for public procurement. It requires that all ICT products and services procured by the government are accessible to persons with disabilities. This includes hardware,

software, and digital content such as websites and mobile applications. Furthermore, the Standard requires that procurement processes for ICT products and services consider accessibility as a key factor. This means that accessibility should be taken into account when evaluating bids from suppliers and selecting the most appropriate product or service. These requirements will ultimately empower persons with disabilities as workers, entrepreneurs and consumers to use ICT for various purposes including e-commerce and/or digital labour platforms. (Kenya Bureau of Standards, 2022).

Inclusive data protection regulations are another important component of a policy strategy for enabling persons with disabilities to participate safely in digital trade and the digital world broadly. Still in Kenya, for example, the **Data Protection Act** allows people to opt-out of automatic data processing to create a profile adjusted to their impairment and nominate a guardian or administrator to manage their rights towards their personal data. These regulations provide a greater sense of security to persons with disabilities when they engage in e-commerce and other online transactions, reducing their concerns regarding account theft or fraud, and fostering a more inclusive and accessible online environment (GSMA, 2022).

## 5 Recommendations for a disability inclusive AfT agenda

This report highlighted several themes that can contribute to the formulation of policy measures for making trade more inclusive for persons with disabilities. Policy suggestions have been provided throughout the report. This final chapter concludes by summarizing main recommendations for how AfT could be best used to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of trade expansion.

### **1. Ensure that global trade rules are consistent with government commitments to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities.**

Trade agreements which are fully aligned with the obligations enshrined in the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities can constitute a stepping stone for the formulation of trade policies that are inclusive of persons with disabilities. References to persons with disabilities in existing agreements are limited, however, and seem to largely reflect a medical understanding of disability, which frames disability as an adverse characteristic of certain groups that merely need protection. Disability provisions need to be more comprehensive and must be integrated throughout all the chapters of a trade agreement. Robust institutional frameworks need to be in place to support enforcement. Resources under the AfT category of 'trade policy and regulations' could be used to provide technical and institutional support to train trade officials on disability inclusion, and to strengthen AfT recipient countries' capacity to apply a human rights perspective in trade negotiations. AfT should also be used to equip OPDs with the resources and skills required to actively contribute to trade negotiations.

### **2. Support the substantive participation of persons with disabilities and OPDs in AfT design and implementation, and in trade policy arenas more in general.**

It is crucial to ensure that persons with disabilities and their organizations are involved not only in consultations on trade agreements, but also in other national conversations regarding all aspects of trade policy, including regulatory reforms, complementary policies and technical assistance. This could be partly achieved by supporting the regular inclusion of national disability focal points in trade decision-making bodies. Mechanisms to represent greater diversity of disability perspectives in the design, implementation and monitoring of AfT interventions should be aimed at strengthening the participation of groups representing the interests of persons with disabilities at the stages of both needs identification (e.g. preparation of Diagnostic Trade Integration Studies (DTIS)) and allocation of assistance (e.g. preparation and implementation of Action Matrix priorities).

### **3. Promote integrated approaches to employment policy and robust multi-stakeholder engagement to generate decent jobs in GVCs for persons with disabilities, with emphasis on high value-added sectors and occupations.**

Improving terms of inclusion of workers with disabilities in trade-related jobs requires concerted policy action on several fronts. It requires measures to enhance terms and conditions of work in occupations and sectors where persons with disabilities already work, but also measures to increase access of persons with disabilities to secure and well remunerated jobs in higher value-added segments of GVCs. Governments, private companies and OPDs all have a role to play in promoting these measures.

Under the AfT category of 'building productive capacity', resources could be allocated to strengthening current efforts to support informal micro-entrepreneurs and small producers with disabilities in agricultural and garments GVCs. Multi-stakeholder programmes that strive to provide integrated packages of services and use participatory methods to enable persons with disability to decide on priorities, appear to be the most effective.

It is important to go beyond programmes aimed at promoting micro-entrepreneurship in traditional export-oriented sectors. AfT assistance should also be directed at supporting national governments and the private sector in their efforts to promote access of persons with disabilities to formal jobs in new dynamic export-oriented sectors such as ICT, green industries and tourism, and to mainstream disability inclusion in national employment policy frameworks. This is likely to require a range of macro and micro level policies and could include, among others: promoting diverse skill sets and accessible training to prepare workers with disabilities for trade-related jobs; programmes to place persons with disabilities in export-oriented factories and help employers in providing reasonable accommodation and overcoming prejudice against disability (where it exists); enforcement of occupational safety and health standards to protect workers with disabilities and prevent further disabilities.

A starting point to help identification of sectoral priorities and binding constraints in relation to disability inclusion in employment strategies could involve routinely integrating economy-wide disability inclusive labour market assessments of the kind described in section 4.1 into DTIS processes. AfT resources could be used to support the development of the technical skills and data resources required to mainstream disability in both DTIS and Action Matrices.

#### **4. Invest in physical infrastructure that complies with universal design principles and promotes accessibility.**

Funds currently allocated under the AfT category of 'economic infrastructure' tend to account for the largest share of AfT investments in most countries. Improved transportation infrastructure, in particular, is crucial to increase access to both domestic and international markets, and can also contribute to widen employment options for persons with disabilities. There are many ways in which these infrastructural investments could be used to build new, or modify existing infrastructure to specifically reduce barriers that persons with disabilities face in the physical environment. Examples include, among others: making every vehicle entrance-accessible, adding ramp access at bus or train stops and handrails at the entrance of buses.

AfT investments could be used to build new infrastructure that reflects universal design principles or to retrofit existing infrastructure for greater accessibility, when building new infrastructure is too expensive. Regular training should be offered to those involved in building and maintaining physical infrastructure to promote greater compliance with universal accessibility standards. Persons with disabilities and their organizations must be involved in decisions on how AfT can be prioritized to reduce the barriers in physical infrastructure that affect them the most.

#### **5. Reduce the digital divide to promote the safe inclusion of persons with disabilities in ICT-enabled international trade.**

Digital trade accounts for a growing share of international trade, but many persons with disabilities lack the resources and skills to access digital technologies, and thus remain excluded from its benefits. AfT resources specifically directed at improving ICT infrastructure have increased considerably in the last few years and there is growing recognition in the donor community that holistic policy approaches are required to achieve more inclusive outcomes in the digital sector. It is paramount that AfT initiatives pay greater attention to the safe inclusion of persons with disabilities in ICT-enabled trade. This could be achieved by combining measures to provide accessible and affordable ICT infrastructure with accessible training in digital skills and apprenticeships specifically aimed at persons with disabilities. Robust regulatory frameworks to protect against cybercrime that might particularly affect workers and consumers with disabilities are also crucial.

## **6. Use AfT to develop local capacity to provide AT products and repair services, and help firms from low-income countries to integrate into global AT markets.**

As a product and service, the provision of AT can constitute a trade opportunity as well as an important enabler for persons with disabilities to take advantage of employment opportunities generated by trade. AfT assistance could play an important role in promoting greater availability and use of AT products in LMICs. AfT resources could be used, for example, to enhance LMICs' capacity to produce AT that meets local needs, by supporting the development of local skills in producing spare parts and assisting users with service repairs. Moreover, AfT investment in trade infrastructure and development could be directed at specifically addressing supply chain bottlenecks in AT sectors and promoting South-South cooperation and regional trade. Finally, AfT assistance could be used to review tariffs on AT products that are imported, where they exist, with a view to improve affordability for potential users in low-income countries.

## **7. Strengthen data analysis and monitoring.**

There is currently limited information on how international trade may impact persons with disabilities, largely due to the invisibility of persons with disabilities in national statistics. Enabling disability rights monitoring in relation to trade changes requires developing indicators based on data that are internationally comparable and can be disaggregated by disability status and, ideally, type of disability. Questions on disability should be regularly included in labour force surveys and other household surveys so as to monitor the various channels (employment, consumption, public provision) through which trade might affect persons with disabilities. Offices for national statistics in LMICs may need financial and technical support to develop the relevant survey modules. National statistics offices

as well as various stakeholders involved in value chains (e.g. multinational companies and civil society organizations) can take advantage of recent progress made in the development of survey questions to collect data on disability<sup>13</sup>.

Examples of issues that researchers and policy makers could investigate and monitor with data from such surveys include: Are there export sectors in which workers with disabilities tend to cluster (e.g. agriculture)? Are there trade-related occupations where they tend to be overrepresented (e.g. home-based industrial work)? Do employment patterns of persons with disabilities in trade-related sectors further vary depending on disability type, age or gender? What proportion of workers with disabilities work in sectors exposed to import competition? Are opportunities for training and promotions equally available to workers with disabilities? How many workers with disabilities are able to gain employment in new dynamic trade sectors such ICT or green industries? What are the main barriers in accessing these sectors they face? Is the digital divide between persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities reducing? If yes, what are the most contributing factors? Strengthening nationally representative data collection and analysis is an important step towards better documenting the linkages between trade and the well-being of persons with disabilities and helping to identify the main barriers that trade policies must address to promote disability inclusive trade outcomes.

There is also scope for raising awareness and improving monitoring around disability inclusion at the programme level, for example by carrying out comprehensive gender equality and disability inclusion assessments at the planning stage of any trade project, and by adding disability indicators and questions in Aft questionnaires, EIF results frameworks and similar checklists.

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13 The Washington Group (WG) on Disability Statistics, in collaboration with international organizations such as UNICEF and ILO has developed and field-tested several sets of disability questions, including a short set (WG-SS) with six questions, an enhanced set, an extended set, a child functioning module, an inclusive education module and a labour force survey module . The WG-SS captures functional difficulties for adults in six domains (types of disability): seeing, hearing, walking, self-care, cognition, communication. For instance, for seeing, the question is as follows “[Do/Does] [you/he/she] have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?”. For each question, the answer scale prompts the degree of difficulty with the following graded answer scales: “1. No difficulty 2. Some difficulty 3. A lot of difficulty 4. Cannot do at all”. This allows researchers to construct disability measures that exploit information on the degree and type of functional difficulties. These questions are increasingly integrated into national household surveys, population censuses and in other international survey programmes such as the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS).



**8. Expand analysis in policy documents on inclusive trade to increase visibility of specific issues and barriers affecting persons with disabilities.**

A growing number of flagship reports and policy documents examines how international trade can be made more inclusive. With a few exceptions, however, the circumstances and barriers experienced by workers and consumers with disabilities are rarely documented or analysed in detail. Greater attention towards themes of disability inclusion in Global Aid for Trade Reviews, for example, could help in raising awareness among trade policy makers and could also contribute to strengthen disability data collection and analysis (see recommendation 7) in relation to trade policy change.

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